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BY ANNA H. DRURY



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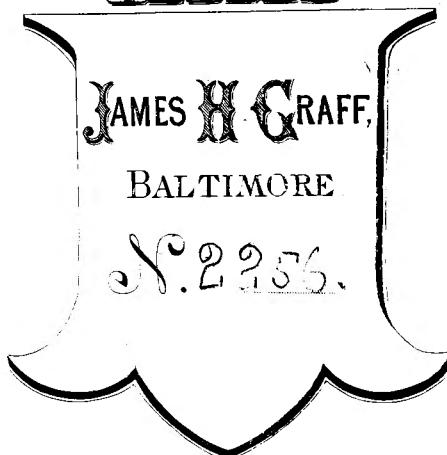
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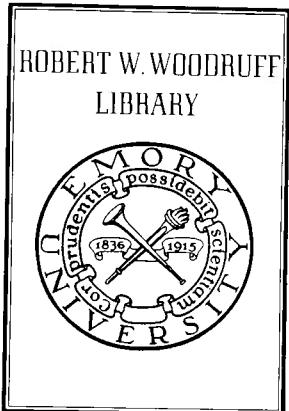
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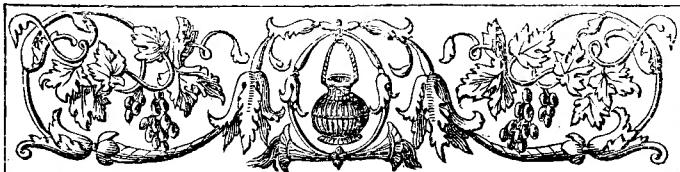
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AUTHOR OF 'DEEP WATERS,' 'MISREPRESENTATION,' ETC.

NEW EDITION.

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THE BROTHERS.

CHAPTER I.

STOURBROOKE VICARAGE.

“**A** FINE evening, Mrs. Brudenell. Oh, I beg your pardon ; did I startle you ?”

“Yes, you did, indeed, you foolish boy. How was I to know you were so close to my elbow? Come in, do.” And the last speaker, a stout, handsome, elderly lady, opened the garden gate on which she had been leaning, to admit her visitor, a tall young man of three-and-twenty, in a light shooting-jacket, with a retriever at his heels. “Come in ; I was wondering I had not seen you before ; only leave your big dog outside, for I never allow him in the house, and that you know.”

“I should hope so, by this time. Home, Nelson, sir—take my stick, like a good dog, and hie home with it this minute. He knows as well as possible that you won’t have him, and I do not think anything short of a written invitation would overcome his modesty. I have brought you a few grapes,” showing a magnificent cluster in a small basket. “Is Mr. Brudenell come home?”

“Now do you think I should be standing here like this if he were? (Thank you, my boy—what beauties! I know a poor girl whose eyes will glisten at the sight of them.) Yes, I am expecting him every moment, and his

tea has been waiting the last half-hour. I do hope nothing has happened to him on the road. I hate his going anywhere without me."

"So does he, I'll be bound. But it may be very good for him, for all that."

"What saucy reason have you got for saying so?"

"It will teach him to feel for wretched bachelors, who are doomed to endure every day what he has suffered for a week."

"It amuses me to hear you boys talk like that. You think it sounds manly, and as if you had seen the world, and all that sort of thing; but I can tell you this,—a young man has no right to pretend he even wishes for a wife who is not ready to work to keep her."

"Are you going to give me a lecture, Mrs. Brudenell?"

"No—I have neither time nor patience for that now; you know my opinion about idleness already, Roland, and I see no good in repeating it where it is not attended to."

"How can you say I am idle? I am on my legs from morning till night. What can a man do more?"

"He can give his legs a rest, and let his head have a turn."

"And do you suppose mine does nothing? If you only knew the heaps of things I have to remember——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that; I know you are your brother's right hand—his head-keeper, groom, steward, and overlooker, and very useful you make yourself, no doubt, as far as that goes; and if that is intellectual occupation enough for you, and the kind of profession you mean to adopt through life, I can only say every one to his taste. It would not be mine; but then I have not the misfortune of being your wife."

"Ah, you measure us all by Mr. Brudenell, and that is not fair."

"It would not be fair, indeed, if I ever thought of paying you such a compliment. Measure you by Mr. Brudenell? Why, Roland, long before he was your age he kept himself entirely; he did not cost his father a shilling after his first year at college, and has worked his

own way, by God's blessing, to comfort and independence ever since. We were engaged ten years, and he was working for me all the while—with his pen, with his brains, with his learning, whenever other duties did not require his whole care and thought. Yes, when it comes to comparing you with him, my boy, you will be leading a very different life from the one you lead now."

"But look here, Mrs. Brudenell—Harcourt always says it is nonsense for me to leave him, and stifle in London chambers, or behind a desk, when he has enough for both ; and that he could never bear to live at home alone ; and I know I should never be happy anywhere else ; so what am I to do ?"

"That is more than I can presume to say. I only maintain this, that while you do nothing to make yourself independent, you only make yourself ridiculous by pretending you wish for a wife. What will you do when Harcourt marries ?"

"Harcourt says he shall never marry."

"Then Harcourt is as silly as you are, and as he is so much older, with less excuse. Ah ! there you are at last !" as a low pony-carriage, containing two gentlemen, came slowly up to the gate. "Welcome home, my dear ! How do you do, Mr. Graham ? Will you not put up the pony and come in ?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Brudenell," returned the gentleman who was driving, as they shook hands, "I am behind time as it is ; the pony goes a little lame ; his best days are over, like mine. We have not all your secret of perpetual youth."

"I wish Mrs. Graham could hear you ; but to tell the truth, I was growing a little impatient, for you are full late. How has he been ?" looking anxiously at her husband, as he stooped to pull his bag from under the seat.

"How has he been behaving, you had better ask. As badly as ever. There were a few of us who had to speak, of course, and only a limited number of ideas among us ; and he spoke first, and monopolised them all, so I leave you to imagine how we felt, when we could only say the

same things over again in worse language. Now that was too bad, you know, Mrs. Brudenell."

"A great deal too bad," said she, delighted beyond measure; "so of course you took care he did not preach."

"Well, other people took care he did, unluckily; and when they had heard him once they would not be satisfied till they heard him again, and when he was not preaching, they made him talk; so, on the whole, it was time he came home; but he has left three young ladies behind him, breaking their hearts at his departure; and at the sensitive ages of nine, seven, and five, that is a serious thing for a father to contemplate."

"They will not be the first he has broken in that way," said Mrs. Brudenell, smiling; but she sighed while she smiled; and the good humoured clerical friend, suddenly aware that he had touched a tender point, hurried his farewells, and drove off at a faster pace than his pony at all approved, or was likely to agree to long.

Mrs. Brudenell looked after him a moment in silence, and passed her hand across her eyes; then turning to her husband, who was standing quietly watching her, began to hurry him into the house, with a brisk cheerfulness a little too lively to be quite natural.

"I know all about it as well as if I had been there. They have been working you to death, as usual. Now you are to come in, and take your tea, and read your letters, if you like, and not speak a word unless you choose; and if you get a nap in your chair, so much the better. Yes, Roland, my boy, you may shake hands with him, certainly, and then you may vanish, for I do not mean to ask you to stay this evening."

"Ah, Roland, is that you?" said the Vicar. He spoke and moved with much more deliberation than his lady, and his voice was as soft and silvery as hers was clear and strong. "I am glad to see you. What news of Harcourt?"

"None since he went to the musical festival three days ago. He was only at home one night before starting for G——. My aunt and cousin were to meet him there,

and Stella would not let him go in a hurry, we all know that, and he will not write unless he has something to say."

"A very good rule too," said the Vicar, with a wistful glance at the pile of letters on the table; "I wish all my correspondents attended to it. But how is it you were left behind? Do not you care for music now?"

"Of course I do, but I care for the honour of my parish more. Yesterday was our great return match against Durningham, you know. Didn't we pound them handsomely too, with five wickets still to go down! I never was so proud of Stourbrooke before. You ought to have managed to get back in time, Mr. Brudenell."

"So I ought. I am very sorry. If I had only thought of it, Maria——"

"You would have hurried, and raced about, and tired yourself still more, just to please that boy," interrupted Mrs. Brudenell; "as if I did not know that, and took care you heard nothing about it! I am as sharp as you, Master Roland, so it is of no use your looking at my tea-table in that voracious manner. I am not going to ask you, and I told you so."

"True, so you did; and the consequence is, I must ask myself. Don't put yourself out of the way for me. I am going to talk to old Jane about it, and by the time Mr. Brudenell is ready, I shall be."

And away he went to the kitchen, where his presence was soon announced by a burst of laughter, and the sounds of an animated scuffle among plates and dishes.

"The impudence of those boys is past belief," observed Mrs. Brudenell, as she followed her husband into his little dressing-room. "Only hear how he is going on with old Jane, as if there were any one else she would allow to interfere in her kitchen when she was cooking for you!"

"Roland is growing a very fine fellow," said the Vicar, thoughtfully. "It is time we all treated him as a man, if he is ever to be one."

"Just what I have been preaching to him in other words, this very evening. He ought to be in a pro-

fession, and you must speak seriously to his brother soon. Because Roland is left dependent upon him, he has no right to keep him idle. Not that he is an idle fellow—he is always doing something, if only mischief; but he must be made to see what a wretched position he will be in, if his brother fails to do him justice. And who could depend on Harcourt's doing anything?"

"They are very much attached," said the Vicar.

"So they are, and in an impulse of affection, Harcourt might be very liberal; but he will never be so from a sense of duty."

As was his wont, when sweeping judgments were passed, Mr. Brudenell made no reply. He finished his toilet in silence, and nothing more was said till he took his seat at the tea-table. The little handmaiden, who was Jane's only assistant, brought in the urn; her face very red, and her lips puckered up with her desperate struggles to be grave.

"Where is Mr. Roland, Nancy?"

"If you please, 'm—" That was all; not a word more could Nancy have said without a shout.

"Is Jane poaching the eggs? Be quick, now, for your master is waiting."

"If you please, 'm—" Choke and gasp, and exit Nancy, exploding in the passage.

"I wonder what mischief that boy is about now!" said Mrs. Brudenell, pausing in the act of making tea, to listen to the sounds in the kitchen.

"We shall know when the eggs come in, I suppose," said the Vicar, unfolding his weekly paper; "he is generally merciful enough not to keep us long in suspense."

The suspense, however, lasted longer than Mrs. Brudenell's patience; and after waiting a few minutes more, she started up, and went to reconnoitre. Her calls being disregarded, she sailed at once into the kitchen, and there found old Jane in a mingled state of apprehension, remonstrance, and amusement, on one side of the fire, little Nancy, crimson with laughing, on the other; and, in the midst, Roland himself—a napkin tied round his head, one apron round his neck, and another round his waist,

and in his hand the large frying-pan, where something of most appetising odour was fizzing in a very scientific style.

"Look, now, Mr. Roland ! If here isn't missis. I told you so !" expostulated Jane.

"Don't come near me—don't hinder me, Mrs. Brudenell ! or as surely as I have broken your eggs, you will break my innocent heart ! Don't rob me of my fame just as the laurel is twining for my brow. I declare, Jane, if you touch the pan, I'll empty it over you. Get a hot dish ready, and be alive about it, for if I melt away, you will not replace me in a hurry. It is all right, Mrs. Brudenell, I assure you. I learned to make an omelette when I was at school, and was licked often enough to make me a first-rate cook. Quite true, Nancy ; and if you were trained in the same way, you might some day turn out as clever. Meanwhile, try and recollect your mouth was made for better things than to grin a shy young man out of countenance ; and cut up with the omelette before Jane has the chance of spoiling it. All right, Mrs. Brudenell"—off flew one apron into the coal-scuttle. "I'm just ready"—away went the other through the window. "A good conscience and a well-spent day give zest to the plainest morsel"—here his head-gear, rolled into a ball, sent the old cat raging into the garden—"and now my arduous labours for the public good are over, I am content to retire into private life."

He talked so fast, and was so quick in his movements, all this was done before Mrs. Brudenell could get in a word ; and if she had really been half as angry as she tried to look, she could not have hindered him. As it was, she only patted his broad shoulders, called him a great spoiled baby,—she having helped to spoil him all his life as much as anybody,—and told him to go and make himself tidy in the dressing-room, or she would give him no tea. His arrangements did not take long, and he was soon seated with a radiant face of self-satisfaction opposite the dish of which he was so proud.

"What would your aunt, Mrs. Porchester, have said, if she had seen you ?" asked Mrs. Brudenell, as she filled his plate with good things.

"What would she have said? Just what I am going to say—pass the omelette this way, Nancy—I am positive she would, unless, indeed, cousin Stella were by, which might alter the case. Her only chance of ever having what she likes is when she is out of Stella's sight, poor woman. Well, now, Mr. Brudenell, what do you say to my performance? Ought a man to be dubbed an idler who can turn out such work as that?"

"Certainly not," said the Vicar.

"Then take my part with Mrs. Brudenell, sir, will you, for she was giving it me well just before you came."

"Was she indeed? I am sorry to hear it, Roland, for the chances are, now I am come, I shall agree with her."

"No; but seriously, now, what is it you think I ought to do?"

This, like many other questions, was easier to ask than to answer. The Vicar made no attempt to do so, and all three were silent for some little time. Roland's anxiety for an immediate reply was not so keen as his appetite; and it was not till he had disposed of a liberal portion of the good cheer before him that he returned to the subject.

"You know, sir, there is more than enough for Harcourt and me as it is, and Harcourt has often told me he considers I have as good a right to it all as himself; and why should I go away from him and my home to fag for more? Why is it idle to spend my time on the property, and do my best to see that Harcourt is not cheated, and that everything is kept in order?"

"It is not that you are idle, Roland, but that you are dependent, and without a profession."

"I don't call it dependent to be at home."

"So long as it is home, well and good."

"And what else can it ever be, while it is my brother's?"

"Ah, Roland, there are some things that are plain enough to those who have experience, but very hard to believe without it."

"That means that some day Harcourt and I are to

have a grand quarrel, like the two fellows in ‘As You Like It,’ and it is to end in my marching off without even an old Adam to keep me company. Aunt Porchester has often hinted the same. I really believe you all consider he keeps me out of charity, because I amuse him ; and when he is tired of me will turn me adrift.”

“ Well, my boy, we have gone over this ground before, and I have spoken my mind to Harcourt still more plainly than to you. So far from doubting his affection for you, it is that very affection that I dread.”

“ You wish him not to care for me.”

“ I wish him to care more for your future than for your present. If you were to be his heir, there might be some shadow of excuse for keeping you at home; but whenever he marries, and has a family growing up round him, you will both be sorry if you despise an old friend’s warning now.”

“ Well, whenever he marries, which I don’t think he will, he must get me an appointment. He has plenty of interest, you know—he always says he has but to ask and have. I can quite understand,” Roland went on with a candid air, as if ready to humour prejudice as far as he could, “ that if I depended on my own work, I ought to begin at once ; but if I can be sure of a competency without, why should I give up my home and Harcourt for nothing ? ”

“ Why ? ” said Mrs. Brudenell, who could contain herself no longer, “ because a crust that you earn yourself is better than a feast at the expense of anybody else—because, if you ever mean to work like a man at all, you must get the habit of it before other habits are formed—because, if you go on in idleness, you will be sure to fall into bad ways, and may end as others, equally promising, have ended, in becoming the ruin of all who trust and the misery of all who love you ! ”

“ Oh, Mrs. Brudenell, God forbid ! ”

“ Amen, Roland. God forbid you should run the risk ; for depend upon it the penalty will follow. I have too good reason for saying so.”

“ My dear Maria——,” began the Vicar, in a low voice.

"No, you need not be afraid, Julian ; I am not going to mention names, or violate charity ; but if Roland only knew half that you and I could tell him, he would see we were not speaking of what we did not know, nor bearing witness of what we had not seen. I wish we were!"

"You mean, then," interrupted Roland, "that you are speaking of a real person, who has turned out such a wretch as you describe, merely because he had no profession ?"

The husband and wife exchanged a look ; the Vicar pushed aside his empty cup, and left the room ; and Mrs. Brudenell turned to her guest.

"I mean what I have told you, Roland ; that I have seen idleness and expectation end in bad habits, and the wreck of all that was promising and attractive. It seems but a short time ago, that one, as hopeful as yourself, argued as you do, and would have been as indignant as you, if any one had foretold he would break his wife's heart, and bring down the grey hairs of his mother in sorrow to the grave—yet he has lived to do both, and to find himself descending to his own, with nothing left of all his gifts, but the memory of friends that he has injured, and of hopes that he has thrown away !"

Roland got up hastily, and walked to the window. "Did I ever see him ?" he asked, presently.

"No, and I trust you never will. Come, my boy," putting her hand on his shoulder, "do not be offended with me for speaking to you like this ; if I did not care for you, I should hold my tongue, and spare myself the pain of remembering what I would much rather forget. There," interrupting his protest, "I know all you think you ought to say, and believe as much as I choose. Look, is not that your little saucy groom, whom you are bringing up to be as idle as yourself ? He has got a letter for you. Don't let him in. I won't have him giggling and gossiping with Nancy. If I must have one or the other I would rather have Nelson of the two."

Roland ran out, and soon returned, waving an open letter over his head.

"Jolly old Harcourt, what a trump he is ! Just listen, Mrs. Brudenell. This is what he writes :

“ DEAR ROLAND,—You deserve so well of your country for licking Durningham, that you shall receive the classical reward of exile. The ladies are going to take me on a great tour, so we are off to London to-morrow, to buy carpet-bags and paper collars. You would only be an incumbrance on a civilised expedition, but if you fancy a tramp through Switzerland on your own huge legs, put them into the train to-morrow, and come up to us at the Great Western. You shall have sixpence in your pocket for bread and cheese on the road, and we can meet somewhere between China and Japan, when you are as tired of your own company as we shall be of ours.

“ Yours ever,

“ HARCOURT CLARENCEON.’

There, Mrs. Brudenell, is not that good of him? He knows it is the very thing I have been wishing for the last six weeks. That is just what he is always doing—always has done. Can I do better than stick to him as long as he will have me?”

“ Stick to him by all means, Roland—for life. But show you are worth sticking to in return.”

“ I will, I promise I will; when this trip is over, see if I do not set to work. I must run home now, and give orders, or everything will be at sixes and sevens while I am away. You shall have no end of letters. I shall write from every place I stop at. Yes, indeed I shall, for all you don’t believe me; and if I pick up a new receipt for an omelette, I will make it for you when I come home.”



CHAPTER II.

I N T E R L A C H E N.

THE heat of a July day was subsiding into the comparative coolness of evening, when a young man, whose light costume, fair complexion, and powerfully-built frame, were all equally English, strode briskly through the town

of Interlachen, looking up at the picturesque hotels he passed, with the undecided, anxious glance of one who fears to make a mistake. If he had been the responsible escort of a party of fastidious ladies, this anxiety might have appeared natural; but the knapsack and alpenstock bespoke a degree of independence that left it still to be accounted for. He had already passed all the principal ones, without making up his mind, and was more deliberately retracing his steps, when the matter was decided for him by a personage in whom every eye could read the accomplished courier, standing, cap in hand, to greet him at the gate of the Hôtel Belvedere. With a start, not entirely of satisfaction, he stopped short as he returned the salute.

“Ah, Louis, is it you? Is my brother here?”

“Yes, sir,” was the reply, in very fair English; “we have been here now two days.”

“Who are your party?”

“Madame Porchester and Mademoiselle, M. Gervase Wray, and *M. votre frère*.”

“How is my aunt, do you know?” asked the new comer, as he mechanically obeyed the gesture that invited him into the hôtel.

“Madame was tired with her journey, but is better to-day. They are all gone on the lake to the Giessbach. You have not dined, M. Roland?”

“Not that I know of. Too late for the table d'hôte, of course?”

“Oh yes, sir; but I can order you what you please. You will sleep here, no doubt.”

“I suppose so. Stop a bit. I am in no hurry for my dinner. Can you tell me if anybody—have any strangers arrived here to-day?”

“Not to-day, sir; last evening several parties arrived.”

“Do you know their names, by chance?”

“They are in the book, sir; it lies in the *salon*. If you will step into the *salle-à-manger*, I will bring it you. This way, sir.” And, exchanging, as he passed, a few significant words with the waiters, Louis ushered his master’s brother into the desired coffee-room. “All the

world is gone out this warm evening, sir ; you will have it all to yourself. You would see the book before you dine—yes ? I will bring it to you in a minute.”

He darted into the saloon, and quickly laid the volume before the new guest, whose eye ran down the freshly-written page till it lighted on his own party :

Mrs. Porchester	}	
Miss Porchester		England.
Mr. Gervase Wray		
Mr. Clarendon		

“ Will you put yours with theirs, sir ? ”

“ Wait a bit ; I am not quite sure whether I can stay here to-night. ‘ Professor Patterfast and family, New York ; ’ ‘ Le Comte de Something or other ’—why can’t people write their names decently, if they mean them to be read ? ‘ Mrs. Marmaduke Brown and daughters, Manchester, charmed with the beauty of this romantic spot ’—who cares a straw whether they are or not ? ‘ Mr. Saville—Miss Egerton.’ Oh ! give me a pen, Louis.” And down went, in large bold characters, “ Mr. Roland Clarendon, England.”

“ Of course I can have a bed, Louis ? ”

“ I will attend to that, sir. Mr. Clarendon and the ladies are *au second*, and that is full, I know ; but some travellers prefer going a little higher. Mr. Saville is *au quatrième*, and he said this morning it was cooler than below.”

“ If it is good enough for Mr. Saville, it should be for me. Miss Egerton—where is she ? ”

“ Her room is next to monsieur’s, and there is one close by, vacated this afternoon by a great Americanish gentleman, M. le Professeur Patterfast—if that will do.”

“ I should think it ought, unworthy as I am to succeed such greatness. Run and secure it at once, and tell those fellows to send me in whatever comes first, for I am ravenous, and I do not care to sit here by myself. Everybody gone out, you say ? ”

“ The place is quite deserted, sir ; the day has been so hot, they could do nothing, you see.”

“ Hot ? Well, yes, I suppose it has, for those who

did not walk in the sun, especially," said Roland, slipping off his knapsack as the courier left the room, and stretching his long limbs with secret pride in their untiring strength. "But Harcourt is not the fellow to stay at home for fear of his complexion in general. I suspect cousin Stella must have been more in fault than the sunbeams. But I wish I had known I should find them all here."

He lounged about the room ; read, or tried to read, not being the most profound linguist in the world, one or two German and French papers ; studied a week's old Galignani, without taking in a word of its contents ; and had just flung it away in desperation, when his dinner began to arrive in slow instalments, and the appetite of three-and-twenty was imperious enough to absorb his whole attention for the time. Louis had evidently put the establishment in possession of the fact that his rich employer's brother deserved as good treatment as the employer himself ; and the dishes, warmed up in haste though they were, conveyed a savoury, appetising odour to one who had eaten nothing but cheese and eggs during a thirty miles' walk.

"How long does this Giessbach take people to see, Louis ?" he asked, for that functionary hovered about during the meal, in readiness for conversation or orders. "Will they be late, do you suppose ?"

"I think not, sir ; the steamer returns by eight o'clock. I beg your pardon, sir ; I was mistaken in thinking all the guests were gone. I see Mr. Saville is sitting in the garden, and Mademoiselle. You will take some more wine, M. Roland ?" as that young gentleman threw down his napkin, and, nearly overturning his glass, declared he had dined, and they need not bother him with anything more.

"Finish the bottle yourself, Louis—take my knapsack to my room, and yourself out of my way, there's a good fellow," he said, gaining the door at one stride, but pausing for half a moment before opening it, to take a gold coin out of his waistcoat-pocket, and make a sign that brought the courier's ready fingers in contact with his own. Not a word passed, but Louis bowed lower

than before, and the young Englishman, avoiding his eye, hastened with a beating heart into the garden.

He had not far to look for the object of his search. On a bench, just outside the door, half reclined an elderly white-haired gentleman, his head leaning back against the wall, and the newspaper on his knees, as it had slipped from his hold when surprised by his after-dinner nap. On the same bench, at a little distance, a young lady sat at work, her features partly hidden by her hat and feather, but enough left visible to make Roland's huge frame quiver all over with nervous excitement. He had a light step, as active walkers generally have, and he was standing behind her, looking down at the little fingers, so busy over their embroidery, before she was aware of his presence.

“Miss Egerton—I hope—”

She was startled; who would not be to find somebody you supposed to be some hundred miles off turning up at your elbow at the very moment that you were thinking of him? Roland caught her work in the act of falling, and was down on his knees in a moment after the scissors, which actually did fall.

“Just like my awkwardness to startle you like this,” said he, with a smile she could not help returning; “have you dropped anything else? Quite sure? Then, now, let me apologise. The fact was, I was so glad to see you sitting here, I did not stop to think if I should be intrusive.”

“You are very kind, Mr. Clarendon,” said the young lady, whose face had considerably gained in colour since her start; “I am sure Mr. Saville will be delighted to see you again. He is a little tired to-day,” glancing at the sleeper; “I would rather not disturb him.”

“I would not do so for the world. Have you been over-doing it with excursions since I had the happiness of making your acquaintance in Paris? I thought by your programme you had a good piece of work cut out before you.”

“And so, if I recollect rightly, had you; but I do **not** remember that Interlachen was in yours.”

"Oh, don't you? No, now you mention it, Miss Egerton, I do not think it was. It is a blessed thing to be able to change one's mind sometimes—as well as one's money."

"When did your change of plan take place, may I ask?"

"When? Let me see, I cannot be particular as to hours or minutes, but I believe the first idea arose immediately on my recognising the infinite superiority of yours."

"You have been following us, then?"

"I am afraid I have. It was not my fault; I was obliged to stay two days in Paris after you left. How I detested the very sight of the place!"

"I thought you were delighted with it, when we had the pleasure of seeing you there."

"I thought so too, but as soon as you were gone I found it was all a mistake. I like this place much better."

The young lady bent over her work without replying, but the light glow on her cheeks, and half-restrained smile on her lips, betrayed alike her consciousness of his meaning, and her toleration of it. A short silence ensued, during which he stood, as before, a little at the back of her seat, looking down at her as if he could not satiate his eyes.

She was not beautiful, but her face was very sweet and intelligent, her broad open brow was shaded by smooth bands of brown hair, and her clear hazel eyes, thoughtful even to seriousness when at rest, literally shone with brightness when animated. She was small and slender in figure, but her fair round cheek betrayed no ill-health, and her movements had the ready grace of habitual activity. Her voice and manner were winning and frank, though, in addressing her present companion, a slight nervousness might have been observed, which gave our friend Roland more satisfaction than he could at once have accounted for. This at least he had ascertained, she was not offended by his pursuit, or reluctant to renew their intercourse; and the garden of the Belvedere was rapidly taking the hues of fairyland.

The peak of the Jungfrau, the pride and glory of Interlachen, was full in their view ; and as Marion, when aware she had been silent rather longer than courtesy seemed to demand, raised her eyes again from her work, the sight they met made her utter an exclamation of pleasure. The snowy summit was glowing with the rosy tint so often described by travellers—which to her eyes had the exquisite charm of novelty.

"Oh, Mr. Clarendon, look at that—is it not lovely ?" she exclaimed so eagerly, that the white-haired gentleman at the corner opened his eyes, though he did not move at first. Roland looked as she desired, but for a moment only.

"Yes, there must be a fine sunset," he said ; "we shall have a splendid day to-morrow."

"What a tint that is ! Ah, it is fading now. I have often heard of this, but I never saw it before, or anything like it."

"There is only one thing like it in the world," said Roland.

"And what is that ?"

"The blush on a face we love."

His voice had dropped almost to a whisper, but it was distinct enough to create the effect he described, for Marion's very temples glowed celestial rosy red. She did not meet his eyes, but a soft light played for a moment in her own ; and the next they were cast down with a seriousness that almost amounted to melancholy. Roland could have stood there watching her till it grew too dark to watch, but his eyes happening to glance a little beyond, suddenly found themselves encountered by another pair, sparkling under overhanging white eyebrows, with an expression that made the young man's cheeks rival the Alpine glow.

"You here, Mr. Clarendon, after all ? Well done !" And Mr. Saville slowly raised himself from his recumbent attitude, and extended a hand which Roland had to come round and take, murmuring something, he did not know what. "I told Marion I thought you would turn up again, and you see I was right."

"Quite right, sir. I find my brother and a party of friends are here," said Roland, not quite ingenuously.

"Your brother? To be sure, the name struck me directly; and that reminds me—may I ask if your father's name was Harcourt?"

"It was sir; my brother is named after him. Did you know my father?"

"Know Harcourt Clarendon of Morlands? He was my oldest and for many years my most intimate friend. I know now what struck me directly I saw you—it was your likeness to him when he was at Oxford with me. Are you not considered like him?"

"I believe I am, sir; I wish I may be."

"I wish it, and believe it too. Harcourt Clarendon was not of the type that should leave the world no copy. How singular that we should meet in this way, and that it should not have occurred to me in Paris whose son you were. You must introduce us to your brother. I sat opposite to him to-day at dinner, little guessing who he was. A very handsome lady sat next to him—is she a relation?"

"My cousin, Miss Porchester, I suppose you mean."

"Porchester? Ah, yes, I remember now; and the lady with her must be your aunt, with whom I danced half the night at her first ball. How time slips away! It seems only the other day to me; and yet these shrunk shanks," stretching out his leg as he spoke, "would be rather astonished now if bidden to take the floor with a lovely débutante. Yours is the real time of life, my dear boy, if you only make a good use of it."

"Ah, sir, I am afraid——"

"You have not made good use of your advantages, eh? Courage, you have plenty of time before you, and in good hands, who knows what a proficient you would soon become? But I think you said you had been to Oxford?"

"Yes, sir, but you see——"

"Even Oxford did not open your eyes? Poor young man! then the sooner you are helped, the better. Never too late to mend, you know."

"Is the old fellow chaffing me?" thought Roland, somewhat disrespectfully, for the suppressed satire in Mr. Saville's tone nettled him all the more that he did not quite see what he meant. He stole a glance at Marion : she was watching him with a grave interest that at once put everything else out of his head. He took his seat on the bench between them, and was soon chatting away with his usual gay good humour, describing his adventures since they had parted, with a zest and enjoyment he had been far from feeling at the time, though Marion's laugh at the recital made him believe that he had. Time flew quickly while thus engaged, and he was becoming oblivious of the very existence of anybody but themselves, when recollection was recalled by the sound of well-known voices.

"Roland here? No! Why how could he have found us out? Where is he? Louis said he dined here," were all that the three listeners could distinguish.

"My party," said Roland, rising with more reluctance than he ought to have shown; "I hope you will allow me to make them known to you."

"Where is he? Smoking in the garden, of course," broke in again an unseen voice.

"Oh, what a libel! I shall call upon you as a witness, Miss Egerton; the Jungfrau is not more guiltless than I am. I must go, I see, before my character is quite taken away by such a School for Scandal."

And away he hurried, assuming a little more eagerness than he felt, as he entered the private sitting-room, and paid his greetings to his aunt and cousin.

Mrs. Porchester was a fair, faded woman, who had been pretty, and was still good-natured, but whose natural weakness of character had only increased with her increasing years. She was, in consequence, the slave, in mind and body, of her daughter, who, in height, appearance, and demeanour, so completely threw her into the shade, that maternal guardianship and authority were little more than respectable fictions. She was, indeed, allowed the privilege of arranging whatever was troublesome, and of providing the funds for their daily life, but

with no more power to lay down a plan of procedure, than a Merovingian king under the sway of a mayor of the palace.

Stella Porchester, to whom Roland involuntarily turned his eyes before saluting his aunt, was unusually handsome and as highly dressed as it was possible to be without actually overstepping the line of good taste ; but at the present moment there was a cloud over her looks, that certainly diminished her personal attractions. Evidently, the tour she had been mainly instrumental in arranging, or the companions she had so carefully selected, or the place where they were staying, or the expedition whence they had just returned, had not answered her expectations ; for the curve of her lips betrayed discontent and weariness, and her eyes looked cold and dull. Her eyes were, indeed, her least beautiful feature, being singularly deficient in light and colour ; but this had never struck Roland as it did now, when just fresh from the sunshine in those of Marión Egerton.

His own welcome, however, was far from being repulsive. His cousin seemed really pleased to see him, and at once accepted the half-implied compliment, that it was her presence which had lured him thither. Stella Porchester was by no means deficient in ability ; in some matters she was remarkably clear-headed ; but wherever her ruling passion of vanity interfered, she was as liable to mistakes as most people.

“ It is quite refreshing to look at you, Roland, or at any one who has so good-humoured a face. We are all in most deplorably low spirits—you know what that means—it is only a miracle that we have not quarrelled. Nothing would do, but we must rush off directly after dinner to the lake, to see the Giessbach, and when we got there, we had to race up and down, hardly giving ourselves time to look at anything, because the steamer would start again in twenty minutes, and no other boat could be had, and we were all tired and cross, and, in short, the whole thing was a bore and a failure. And now we would give the world for a cup of tea, and cannot get it. Mamma, I dare say you did not make the waiter understand you. The people never do understand your French.”

"Indeed, my dearest love, I think he did ; I spoke as distinctly as I could, and now I remember, he answered me in English, though I was not quite sure what he said. It is very odd, Roland, how the waiters and people answer me in English, however bad, in preference to French, which, one would suppose, came more naturally to them ; and sometimes they even seem to understand my English better than my French. I wonder why it is."

"What have you done with Harcourt, Stella ?" asked Roland, without helping her to solve the riddle. He, like the rest, had an unconscious habit of allowing many of Mrs. Porchester's remarks to pass unanswered.

"Done ? nothing at all," returned his cousin, with some emphasis. "I have very little to do with him, I assure you. Here he comes to answer for himself," as two gentlemen entered the room, and Roland's hand was the next minute in his brother's.

Very unlike him that brother was ; Saladin and Coeur de Lion were not moulded in types more different. Roland was a genuine specimen of the modern Anglo-Saxon ; gigantic, ruddy, and fair-haired, with broad blue eyes, radiant with good humour and strength. Harcourt, several years his senior, was of middle height, his face dark and aquiline, his eyes piercing, and deeply sunken beneath thick eye-brows, and his lips so closely set, that it needed no skill in physiognomy to read the indomitable stubbornness he could employ when he chose, either in carrying out a purpose of his own, or resisting other people's. It often happened that he did *not* choose, and would allow himself to be guided with a silken thread, appearing to take a lazy pleasure in submitting indulgently to weakness ; but there was no depending on this capricious docility, and the cloud on Miss Porchester's brow was a sign which those around her understood very well.

There could be no doubt, however, of his pleasure at the sight of his brother, between whom and himself existed an affection whose tenderness was known only to themselves. From the day when the elder was allowed to creep, with noiseless feet, into the darkened room, where

was displayed to his wondering eyes the much wished-for brother, Harcourt had been in the habit of looking on Roland as something peculiarly his own; and through the petting of infancy, the protectorate of early school-days, and the guardianship of their orphaned youth, had lavished on him a love that effectually veiled the condition of dependence in which the will of their father had left his younger son. Roland had never known care, never thought about money, beyond the expenditure of the day; and took all from his brother's hand as he would have done from his father's, enjoying the present, careless about the future as a child.

"Did you expect to find us here?" was Harcourt's first question, innocent in itself, but bringing a guilty hue to Roland's cheeks, as he could not but confess he did not.

"It was a piece of good luck beyond my deserts," he added, glancing slyly at Stella; "but I am used to being more fortunate than deserving."

"That is better than being like ourselves, more deserving than fortunate," said Miss Porchester, "for with all our domestic virtues, and mamma's excellent French, we cannot get a cup of tea to save our lives; and I am tired to death, though nobody seems to care about it."

"Why not come down to the public room?" asked Roland, eagerly; "you are sure of prompt attendance there, and agreeable society besides. You have a great admirer here, Stella, by the way—if that is any news to you—but I suppose you have so many, it scarcely deserves mentioning."

"I, Roland? I am quite out of fashion, I assure you. It will be quite refreshing to find that anybody thinks me worth noticing. Who and what may your friend be—if such a question is fair?

"Fair as the questioner. My friend is Mr. Saville—a white-haired gentleman you must have seen at the table d'hôte—at any rate, he saw *you*, which is more to the purpose."

"Of course I saw him; a very striking countenance he has, and a very pretty niece, or ward—she cannot be his daughter."

"That is his step-daughter, Miss Egerton."

"Saville, did you say?" asked Harcourt, rather abruptly; "where did you meet with him?"

"In Paris; Maxwell introduced me; he is the most agreeable old fellow I have seen for a long time; and do you know, Harcourt, he turns out to be an old friend of my father's. I only just found that out. Come down and speak to him, there's a good fellow."

"Much obliged, but, like Stella, I am tired, and prefer a quiet cup of tea. Gervase, cannot you try your diplomacy with the powers below, and tell them the ladies will never survive it if they wait much longer?"

"Pray do not stir, Mr. Wray," said Stella, rising with an air of decision; "I prefer taking tea in the *salle-à-manger*. I cannot imagine the pleasure of travelling, if one is to see no one but our own party, till we are all tired of each other. Roland, give me your arm; Mr. Wray, will you take care of mamma?" And without a glance at Harcourt she swept past him, followed by the rest as a matter of course. Even Harcourt did not choose to remain behind, but instead of going in with the party, he strolled out into the garden, and lighted a cigarette. Roland was not long in joining him. "Are you not coming to tea, Noll?" he asked, giving him the boyish nickname that he only indulged in when they were quite alone. "What is the matter with you? Have you and Stella quarrelled?"

"Not unless she says so: she knows best. Will you smoke?"

"No, thank you; the ladies might not like it. Come and let me introduce you to Mr. Saville. He is quite impatient to shake hands with you."

"I dare say he is; but I am not."

"Did you know he was here?"

"I knew the name, and thought I knew the man, but it is some time since I saw him last. He is quite right, he was one of my father's oldest friends. He, and Saville, and old Brudenell were schoolboys and under-graduates together, and kept up their regard for each other longer than is the fashion now-a-days. I have a bundle of

Saville's letters to my father, at home. I wonder how he would like to see them.

"You thought you knew him, and yet did not speak to him, you cross-grained Oliver?"

"Exactly. I did not. I had no intention of doing it, and I would rather not do it now, only I cannot leave you in the scrape by yourself. Don't let him grow too fond of you, that is all. He was uncommonly fond of my father, I am sorry to say."

"Why are you sorry for that?"

"Because I am of a grovelling, sordid disposition, and sometimes have the bad taste to prefer money to love."

"I do not believe you; but what if I did?"

"Only that Mr. Saville took the one in return for the other; he was very fond indeed of his old college friend and schoolfellow, and so he drained him dry. I should be afraid to say how much my father paid for him, and he might as well have flung it all into the sea. Now I think affection like that comes expensive."

"For shame, Harcourt—as if you would not share your last shilling with a friend who wanted it!"

"Yes; but that kind of friend has no fancy for last shillings. He generally prefers a good banker's bock. Saville does, I know; so if we must meet, I mean to harden my tender heart against his winning ways."

"One would think you were a miser, to hear you talk."

"Did you never find that out before? By the way, I suppose your exchequer wants replenishing for Italy."

"No, I have plenty—besides, I think now——You cannot really be afraid of his asking you for money."

"Perhaps not; but I have no fancy for his company. I am too fresh and unsophisticated to enjoy it."

"Oh, if you are only chaffing, I may as well go in."

"Wait one moment; I am going to be as serious as ever I was in my life, for it is a serious matter. In plain English, I have no respect for his character. There is no need to go into particulars: he is pretty well known, I fancy."

" You cannot know much about him, if you have not seen him for years."

" I know what he was, and I do not imagine he is much altered."

" You do not imagine! And you condemn a man unheard, when he may have changed a dozen times for all you know! A man, too, who is old and out of health, and has such a guardian angel with him as that sweet girl! I suppose you will be imagining things about *her* next?"

" Oh! if your periodical attack of love has come on, there is nothing more to be said; we must be content to wait till it is over, or takes a new turn. I have nothing worse to say of her, than that she has very bright eyes."

" I wish you would not talk in that absurd way, as if, because a fellow has been foolish once or twice, he is never to be in earnest in his life. I say, Harcourt—I shall not go to Italy now—it is dull work travelling alone. One's knapsack is a bore, and one wants some one to speak to."

" Well, strike in with us and welcome. I do not know where we are going next. The ladies are to decide."

" That means Stella, of course."

" Stella, if you choose to say so. Come, as this must be done, suppose we do it at once, for I want a cup of tea, and we shall only quarrel if I keep you here."

Roland, rejoicing in his compliant humour, was only too glad to turn back into the hôtel, and they found their party with Mr. Saville and Marion, sitting at tea, evidently on the most sociable terms.

" Here are those truants," said Miss Porchester, who was presiding, with Mr. Saville on her right hand. " Come forward, Harcourt, and justify yourself before this court for not having found out sooner that Mr. Saville was an old friend. Here are mamma and he making the most romantic discoveries of having danced together at balls innumerable, in the good old times of short waists, and high coat collars, tight skirts, and Brummel ties. And if it had not been for this good boy,

Roland, we might have left the place without exchanging a word. What excuse have you to offer?"

"Where the judge is a Jeffreys, and acts as public accuser, all defence is futile," said Harcourt, bowing to the strangers with calm politeness, but ignoring the hand Mr. Saville was prepared to offer. "I am much obliged to Roland for arriving in time to prevent the discovery being made too late. Do you remain here long, Mr. Saville?"

"We leave to-morrow for Baden-Baden."

"Rather early for that, is it not?"

"It is; but my object is health; I have been advised to try the waters again; they were of great service to me once, and I am growing too old to care very much for a crowd."

"Quite right, Mr. Saville," said Stella, "and for my part, I think it is much pleasanter to enjoy a place without being met at every turn by somebody one knows. It is a long time since I was at Baden, and then only for two days."

"I wish I could persuade you to go there with us, Miss Porchester. The beauties of the scenery are very great, and I know all the best excursions, and means of taking them. You would find a great deal to see."

"You are in the habit of going there, Mr. Saville?" said Harcourt.

"Yes—there, and to other watering-places. My health unfortunately requires it."

"Ah, so I feared; and the remedies there are sometimes of a very severe nature, are they not? I have known people very much the worse for a course of treatment, even under very skilful hands."

Mr. Saville looked at him with a peculiar expression in his eyes that would be hard to describe, but only for a moment, as he turned to Mrs. Porchester with a softened smile.

"How like his father that was said. I could almost imagine he was before me. But you are wrong, Clarendon, allow me to remark, as young men often are who form hasty judgments on imperfect evidence."

"I would rather be wrong than right," said Harcourt ; "and that is what young men in general object to admitting in words, whatever they may do in practice."

"Then they are improved since my day, for we had a set who boldly took the motto, 'Evil, be thou my good,' and held to it, in defiance of everybody. Wild days those were. I should be sorry to see them revived for you young fellows."

"Thank you. We are, indeed, such models of steady propriety now-a-days, that we shall be insufferably dull company for you, sir. Our minds will be absorbed in scenery and guide-books, and our time in writing long letters to our friends at home, or journals for the benefit of our posterity. You will be tired of us in a day.

"Very likely ; but it is not for the pleasure of your company that I propose this junction ; with such companions as you have with you, you could not expect to be missed if you were asleep the whole time. Come, Miss Porchester, in you is all my hope. You must be too powerful not to be generous ; let me win you to our side, and then I defy the rest to make difficulties."

"Take care," said Stella. "There are some people who become dreadfully obstinate when defied ; and I prefer setting the example of amiability. Harcourt," turning to him with a smile of entreaty, half real, half assumed, "I should like to see Baden again. Will you take us there to-morrow ?"

"Of course," said he, quickly ; "or to the North Pole if you asked it. Only, if you do not like it this time of year, and are sorry we went, do not blame me, that is all."

He turned away as he spoke, and taking up a French newspaper, remained hidden behind it as long as the party continued in the *salle*. His submission was reluctantly made, that was evident ; but it *was* made, and the triumph in Stella's eyes made them almost bright, as she listened to Mr. Saville's anecdotes, graciously receiving the tribute to her attractions, which no one knew better how to offer. The cloud was gone from her brow, and she was in brilliant spirits for the remainder of the even-

ing; an evening which passed to Roland like a dream, the greater part of it being spent at a window, watching the Jungfrau in the moonlight, by Marion's side.

CHAPTER III.

BASLE.

MRS. PORCHESTER and her daughter shared the same room: that is to say, she was allowed to occupy as much of it as Stella did not want for herself; and her share of their maid's services was in similar proportion. This evening, the young lady appeared unusually impatient, and having curtailed the attendance on herself to half its ordinary length, hardly allowed her mother five minutes before she sent Mrs. Jones away, in spite of remonstrance.

"We shall have a long day's journey to-morrow, Jones, and must be called early; be sure I have a cup of coffee the first thing." And without giving Mrs. Porchester the chance of uttering one of the twenty contradictory orders that were quivering on her lips, she closed the door on the half-smiling Mrs. Jones, and locked it behind her.

"My dear Stella, you are so impetuous—changing all our plans in a minute, and then not explaining to Jones about the boxes. I really do wish you would sometimes let me speak, I do indeed."

"I beg your pardon, mamma, I had no idea you never spoke. I was under the impression that I heard you talking prodigiously this evening. Harcourt thought so, I am sure."

"Oh, my dear, I was obliged to be pleasant and agreeable to dear Harcourt, to make up for your neglect of him. You were so taken up with George Saville; I don't wonder at that, for he is a delightful man, and always was, only sadly wild and extravagant, and decidedly under a cloud at one time, which made Helen Brudenell marry Mr. Egerton first; a sweet creature she

was, I remember her perfectly, and how she was almost engaged to George Saville, and then it all came to nothing, and he went abroad, and they said she would break her heart, but she didn't."

"People never do," said Stella; "it is an exploded error to imagine it. They break other people's, but not their own."

"And quite right, too, my dear; nothing is more against a girl in life than to be supposed to be broken-hearted about anybody. And Helen Brudenell was a sensible young creature; that is, I believe she was dreadfully apt to do things in a hurry, and be sorry afterwards when it was of no use; and she accepted Mr. Egerton, a well-to-do man of business, and very happy they were, only she never got over the disappointment about George, and they had only this one child, and at last her husband died, and then she married George Saville, poor thing."

"Is your pity intended for her, or for him?"

"Oh, my dear, for her, of course, because she died. No, when one thinks of it, it is for him, because he lost her. I believe he ran through all her money, except what was tied up on her daughter. I remember my poor brother Harcourt talking about it at the time, and he said—I can hear him now—that in a few years it would be all they would have to live upon, and I dare say it is quite true."

"Most likely; he has just that grand careless way of talking about money, that betrays the man who has nothing more of his own to trouble himself about. I am glad I am not his step-daughter."

"My dear, what a shocking thing to say!"

"I ask pardon. Am I likely to become so? It is fair to give me notice."

"How can you, Stella? But I do not know what has come to you now; you are not yourself; you are all in a fidget from morning till night, and nobody can make out what you want. Why in the world did you ask to go on to Baden?"

"Because Harcourt did not want to take me there. Very wrong, was it not?"

"I am sure I don't know. I never can make out what goes on between you two: you are like brother and sister one day, and the next you hardly speak. You gave us all no peace till you dragged us abroad to see Switzerland, and now you must go off somewhere else, just to annoy your cousin. I wash my hands of it, that is all I can say."

"Quite right too, mamma, and so would I, if I could; but who can stand against their fate? All the waters of the Giessbach cannot wash away what is written by destiny on my forehead, that I am to die mistress of Morlands."

"My dear, it is very wrong to talk like that, and teasing and quarrelling with Harcourt will not give you Morlands or anything else, so you need not speak of dying in that disagreeable way; and if you want him to care for you, you should study his little whims and humours, and try to please him, as I did your poor papa."

"I can never hope to be what you were, mamma," said Miss Porchester, laughing gently; and she changed the conversation, until it was time to drop it entirely.

The morning rose clear and fine; the two parties met at breakfast in excellent spirits, and the cordiality of the preceding evening was renewed and strengthened. Mr. Saville devoted himself to Stella with an old-fashioned gallantry which Harcourt pronounced to be insufferable, but which became him as well as her pleasure in it became her. She never appeared to such advantage as when animated by success; and her laugh sounded the more gaily that she could see her cousin inwardly chafing at the manner in which she was appropriated. He did not interfere, however; he left Gervase Wray to take care of Mrs. Porchester, and Roland of Miss Egerton, while he lounged about the grounds, or mused over the newspaper, as if quite content that all trouble was taken off his hands. The bill was paid without a comment; the gratuities were in accordance with the credit of the wealthy Englishman; and the ladies' multifarious boxes being at last safely stowed away, the travellers were soon

seated on the deck of the steamer that conveyed them across the Lake of Thun. Those who had crossed it a few days before had done so in a mist, and little knew through what scenes they were passing.

"Look, Mr. Clarendon," said Marion, "we are taking our last farewell of the Jungfrau. We shall see nothing so lovely where we are going, I fear."

Roland lifted his hat as the white peak disappeared. "I shall always love the sound of her name," he said, in a low tone, "for the sake of yesterday evening."

She smiled, but did not remove her eyes from the prospect they were leaving. "I should like to think I should soon see her again," said she, presently.

"What will you give me, if I promise your wish shall be fulfilled?" asked Harcourt, who had come up unobserved, and had been watching them both.

"Give you?" she repeated, blushing at having been overheard; "whatever you would like to accept."

"Done, then, Miss Egerton; you will soon see my share of the compact accomplished, and I shall expect you to do yours."

He walked away before she could ask an explanation, so she turned to inquire of Roland.

"I know nothing about it," said he; "only that what Harcourt promises always comes to pass, and if he said we should soon see the Himalayas, I should believe it. I am so glad you have seen him, and still more, that he has seen *you*."

"He did not seem glad himself though, last evening," said Marion, with a slight shake of the head.

"He was put out yesterday; he is all right now. We live in a changeful atmosphere, and our tempers change with the sunshine, you see."

"I can see that the sun is very bright at this moment, and Mr. Saville is basking in its beams. How very handsome Miss Porchester is when she is animated. I cannot help looking at her, till I am afraid I appear quite rude."

"Between ourselves, Stella is very accommodating, and puts up with being admired very amiably. And as to

its being rude, I would not give sixpence for man or woman who did not take pleasure in a beautiful thing when they saw it."

"Then look before you—see what we are leaving. There! another peak—and another—your brother has redeemed his promise: I never saw anything more lovely."

Slowly, one after another, the white peaks of the Oberland glacier rose on the horizon, so clear and distinct against the sky, it seemed as if an hour's journey would have taken the travellers to their foot; the darker hills in the foreground standing out in bold relief against the bright snow—a vision of nature's glory for which no previous reading, or fancy, can prepare the eyes, that fasten on its beauty as if they would make it their own. To Roland it seemed as if those of Marion had succeeded; and, looking round for Harcourt, he caught a glance from him, betraying a similar impression. But she was too much absorbed to think of them, or utter more than a word or two of awe and delight; unlike Stella Porchester, now calmly discussing every feature in the scenery with Mr. Saville and a courteous Swiss gentleman, who had lent her his telescope, and seemed to think her remarks more worthy of attention than the subject of them. Mrs. Porchester, always melancholy on board a steamer, sat with a large parasol over her head, and her eyes half shut, bearing the giddiness as best she might, with the help of a low murmur of complaint to her cavalier, Mr. Wray, to whom she could lament as she pleased, without fear of contradiction.

He was older than Harcourt, though he looked as young: he had been brought up as if he were to inherit independence, and was, in truth, as poor as he was idle, and as deeply in debt as he was poor; but, having a large acquaintance, and in some degree sharing their credit, he still kept his place in society, and was popular as a good-natured, useful fellow, always ready for anything. To Mrs. Porchester he was peculiarly valuable, whenever she had anything to arrange that required thought and management—faculties of which she pos-

sessed but a scanty share, and which Stella would not take the trouble of using, unless for some object of her own. Having been at some pains to cultivate an intimacy with Harcourt, he had always a welcome at Morlands whenever he chose to seek it; and there was, every now and then, a talk of getting “something” for poor Gervase—a place with a good salary and little to do, which he modestly affirmed was all he was fit for. Meanwhile, he hung on his friends, not as a parasite or flatterer—Harcourt would never have tolerated his company on such terms—but still as one who knew his best claim was his utility, and who never felt his welcome so well earned as when he could put people in good-humour with themselves. If he studied their wishes and their characters rather more closely than they were aware, he never obtruded his knowledge, and possessed all the more real influence for its exercise being unrecognised. To do him justice, he had never yet used it mischievously, nor had he any intention of so doing, not seeing that there was anything to be gained thereby.

“It is quite worth the whole journey to see any one enjoy a view so thoroughly, Miss Egerton,” he heard Harcourt say, when Marion, as the last white peak disappeared, turned round to her companions, and drew a deep breath, as if just awaking. “How is it that all this is new to you, when Mr. Saville has been as good as a hand-book to my cousin, and knows every inch blind-fold?”

“Mr. Saville has travelled a great deal. I have not been about much with him until now—now that,” with some hesitation, “he has no other companion.”

“You have resided abroad though, have you not?”

“Yes. I was at school for a good many years. It is a long time since I was in England.”

“Should you like to return there to live?”

“Yes, very much indeed, if it suited Mr. Saville; but he is never well in England.”

“His health appears unfortunately delicate,” said Harcourt, with a suavity that deceived her unsuspecting ear, but not that of his friend; “do you think Baden will do him good?”

"Oh, I hope so ; he always goes there once a year. Why do you ask ? Are you afraid it will not ?"

"That must depend on the regimen he follows. He knows the place well, and must be a tolerable judge by this time."

She shook her head involuntarily, and her face lost its bright look of pleasure for one of care. The beauties around her were for the moment forgotten.

"Don't you begin croaking, Harcourt," said Roland. "Mr. Saville looks ten years younger this morning than he did yesterday ; and if he goes on at this rate, he will be five-and-twenty before I am. I never saw a man look so different at different times, and really to-day he is one of the youngest of the party."

"That is your cousin's doing," said Marion, smiling. "Nothing animates him so much as the society of ladies whom he admires as he does Miss Porchester."

"I imagine he has been all his life accustomed to receive as much admiration as he gives," observed Harcourt, "if all one has heard be true."

"You know a good deal about him ?" said she, rather eagerly ; "your father was his intimate friend, he told me."

"He was ; and his fervent admirer, which intimate friends seldom are."

"He must have been very fascinating, very attractive," she said, thoughtfully, as if the words meant a great deal more than they seemed to do.

"Yes, he certainly was," said Harcourt, "for I believe he could persuade anybody into anything. Friends, relations, tradesmen—all fared alike ; if they made fifty resolutions to stand firm, his voice and his manner knocked them over in as many seconds."

"I can quite believe it—I can quite believe it," repeated Miss Egerton, "and I think even now——"

She checked herself ; Harcourt smiled good-naturedly.

"Even now, I should imagine, he had not much difficulty in carrying his point with amiable people. Small blame to any one who yields ; but the gift is not without its dangers, and I dare say you have sometimes to thwart

him for his own good. It is woman's special duty towards man, and I know none that is more faithfully performed."

"Is it from your own experience you speak?"

"From my own experience, enlightened by profound reflection on the subject. What a living instance of it I am myself, you may easily judge when I tell you, that for months past I have heard this journey of ours discussed and arranged, always plainly declaring my resolution to stay at home—that when the fixed time arrived, I found my goods and person stowed away in railway carriages and steamers, and not even a choice allowed me of a single stage. Worst of all, when I had, as I hoped, fairly gotten rid of a great troublesome younger brother, always in the way, here I am, saddled with him weeks sooner than I had the smallest right to expect; and it is entirely the doing of you ladies."

"Mr. Saville," said Stella at that moment, "have you observed how very seriously Miss Egerton and my cousin are talking, and occasionally looking at us? I am sure we are under discussion. I can always tell, by a sort of galvanic influence, when I am being talked about; and I feel positively afraid of Miss Egerton's clever eyes. She is very clever, is she not?"

"No, nothing extraordinary; she is quick, and has a clear memory, and a good deal of readiness and sense; but, happily for herself, is no wiser than the rest of her sex."

"That is not one of your polite speeches, Mr. Saville."

"Is it not? Do you consider wisdom fit for women?"

"How are they to get through the world without it?"

"That is answering one question by another. Facts are against you, as they certainly *do*. You need not resent the inference. You have all the graces, the good taste, the right impulses, on your side; and these would lose half their charm if they were the result of reasoning. It is a decided point, you know, that a woman is an exception to the proverbial rule; as her first thoughts are generally right, and her second wrong."

They had been moving towards the rest while speaking, and Miss Porchester now appealed to Marion. "Is it true, Miss Egerton, that Mr. Saville's professed and laudable admiration of our sex is combined with the most profound contempt for their understanding? You ought to be a competent judge, and a safe witness."

Marion looked at her step-father with a smile, but seemed to find so much difficulty in answering the question in the spirit in which it was asked, that Harcourt took some pains to change the subject. He little knew that she overheard him, soon after, remark to his friend Mr. Wray, that Saville, of all men, was best qualified to pronounce on women's wisdom—for they were the only people who had never found him out.

Was that true? Were the womanly understandings that had believed in him, long after men had given him up, quite as obtuse as they were supposed to be? Marion Egerton could have told a different tale, and those words kept her thinking long after they were forgotten by the speaker. In their railway journey from Thun, she was seated by Mrs. Porchester, and had ample leisure for reverie and retrospect.

Her earliest recollections were of such a happy childhood as seemed to her more like an ideal of her imagination than any reality she had actually enjoyed. It was no dream, but it passed away as such; and after a short interval of a grief she was too young to understand, during which she was never out of her mother's sight, came a dreary change, stretching over the best part of her young life. Little had John Egerton known to what he was dooming his pet, when he left her in her mother's hands, as the guardian with whom she would be safest, and on whom it would be an injustice to place any restriction whatever. It was one of the few mistakes of his useful practical life, and it might be pardoned, for he had loved with a blind devotion that saw no fault; and he knew nothing of his wife's early history, often as she had longed for courage to tell it.

Poor Helen Brudenell? With every qualification for giving and enjoying happiness, she had lacked that one

attribute of moral resolution, without which the rest availed her little. Her engagement to George Saville was broken off through the interference of her friends, on account of his character ; and her judgment had acquiesced in the decree that forbade her thinking of him more. He left England with the ban of society on his once loved name, and all said she had had a happy escape. She bore up in the eyes of the world even so as to deceive those who knew her best ; and when, some years after, she married a man considerably her senior, she was believed to be so thoroughly heart-whole, it was a matter of conjecture whether she had ever cared for Saville at all. Adored by her husband, she seemed happy ; he never knew that she was not—perhaps she did not know it herself—and had he lived, and she had confided in his tenderness, it is probable her cure might have been complete. But he died, and left her rich, and unfettered ; and in a foreign tour with her child, she met George Saville again. What need to dwell on the result ? —how, between persuasion, argument, and fascination, her understanding was blinded, and the long dormant passionate love allowed to resume its sway, more despotically than ever ? She gave him all—and for sixteen years followed his wanderings ; never able to persuade him to settle anywhere, but always trying to hope that he would ; and when slowly convinced that his reformation was far from being what he had professed it to be, devoting herself to carry it on. A hard, hard task, for which she was ill qualified, but at which she toiled, during the closing years of her life, as the one object for which they were given—which was to compensate for all besides. In some degree, she was compensated ; her presence and influence had a salutary effect ; and he did care for her sufficiently to yield to her scruples where his inclinations did not stand too much in the way, and to lead a quieter existence than he would have done alone. But meanwhile, she was, for long periods, parted from her child, who, by tacit consent, was never taught to consider him in the light of a father, and was never allowed to interfere with a single plan of his, whether of business

or pleasure. At first, her holidays were spent with them, but this was found inconvenient; and for some years she remained at school, visited by her mother whenever Mr. Saville was absent with friends, on some expedition for health or pleasure. Her visits and her frequent letters were, through this period, the happiness of Marion's life. Mrs. Saville always dreaded her forming intimacies among her companions, and by her special orders, the ladies in whose charge she was left watched over her so assiduously, to form any would have been a difficult matter. She was thus as isolated in the midst of numbers, as if in the obscurest village of her native country, without the compensation of freedom; well taught, well drilled, and kindly treated, but alone in heart; living on the hope, always held out as an incentive to improvement, that when her education was finished, and Mr. Saville's health would permit, she should go home. Home meant to her no particular spot, but wherever her mother was; and when the time came that school might be left, without realising her hopes, it would be hard to say whether mother or daughter suffered most. Two years longer they endured the sickness of hope deferred—a period spent by Marion in greater seclusion than ever—when Mr. Saville unexpectedly paid her a visit, was charmed with her manners and countenance, and carried her away with him as a surprise for her mother—receiving, and perhaps expecting to receive, as much gratitude from both as if he had been her tender protector through all those neglected years. If it were, indeed, an unusual impulse of kind feeling that dictated the proceeding, it met with its full reward; for it remained stamped on Marion's memory when her previous disappointments were forgotten; and she looked on him less as the man who parted her from her mother, than as the one who had united them again. Merciful to both, as it proved, was that reunion; for not long after, Mrs. Saville was taken ill, and after several months of lingering pain, died in the arms of her husband and child. Experience had taught her poor heart and brain to be diplomatic. She left Marion, then within a year

of her majority, under her step-father's guardianship, confiding her to him, when he was alone with her on one occasion, and his tenderness had been stirred up by the parting he saw at hand, as the most precious proof she could give of her trust in his love. And to Marion herself, almost her last whisper was the prayer that had ever since vibrated in her heart, never to leave him while he lived. She did not say, "never give up hopes of him," for the faults from which they suffered were a subject never breathed between those two—but Marion read in the dying eyes all that the lips left unspoken. Everybody said that Mr. Saville would soon grow tired of his charge, and some of their friends tried at first to alter the arrangement; but Marion pleaded her mother's injunction, resisting the most cogent arguments in the strength of that last look; and Mr. Saville, though he shrugged his shoulders, and smiled sarcastically, when bantered about his guardianship, showed no symptoms of wishing to be released from responsibility. Marion's majority placed her in a more independent position with regard to income, and the small fortune remaining to her of all Mr. Egerton's savings, was, in the eyes of the world, quite sufficient attraction to account for the harmony in which she lived with her step-father.

With these outlines of her history, the world in general, meaning such in it as cared to know, was pretty well acquainted; and Mrs. Porchester only required to collect her ideas and recollections a little, to be quite prepared to cross-question her on many points respecting which reports had been contradictory. Had this occurred a month or two sooner, Marion might have thought it irksome; but she was in the mood to be pleased with her new acquaintance, and to wish them to be pleased with her; and she exerted herself to be an agreeable companion, without allowing the conviction to stamp itself on her mind, that Mrs. Porchester was just the reverse. The good lady, who did not always find young people respond to her attentions as they deserved, took a great fancy to her, and availed herself of the opportunity of pouring out all her grievances, past, present, and to

come. Some people are never cured of the delusion that everybody is interested in other people's family affairs ; and the last thing that ever occurred to Mrs. Porchester was to be silent about anything that was at all interesting to herself. They slept at Basle that night ; and the greater part of the evening she kept Miss Egerton by her side, to the great aggravation of Roland, whose only comfort at last was to do his best to interrupt the conversation.

It had reached this point when he approached : "And so, my dear, it came to this, I said to my daughter, either she or I must leave the house."

"Halloo !" ejaculated Roland.

"My dear boy, how you make one jump. What is the matter ?"

"That I must ask *you*, for it sounds to me very serious. It is more than *I* should dare say to Stella, I know, for I should be pretty sure of her answer."

"Of course, my dear, and so was I ; and the long and the short of the matter is, she went—and from that day to this I have never been able to find all my spoons. That was convincing, was it not ?"

"I should think so," said Roland. "The question is, whether we ought to sit down in the same room with her or not."

"With whom, my dear ?"

"With Stella. Here she is to answer for herself. Stella, how could you make away with the family plate ?"

"What is the joke ?" asked Stella, calmly.

"I do not know if you consider it a joke to have your little weaknesses shown up to Miss Egerton. I should be miserable if they were mine."

"I wish Miss Egerton a pleasanter amusement. Mamma, how can you bore her good nature with things she cannot care to hear ? Yes, I understand, you were only telling cook stories—you know Mrs. Gatty's charming story, Miss Egerton, I dare say—but on a tour we agree to leave sordid household cares behind us. Time enough to take them up when we are obliged to return to England."

"Obliged?" said Marion.

"Well, yes; I may as well use that word, for circumstances are often tyrants, and though no Czar orders us home, we shall have to go when our time is up. You are fortunate in not being tied to time or place."

"I don't know that, my dear," said Mrs. Porchester, shaking her head; "I don't think it at all a good thing for people to be wandering up and down the world, and never being settled, or having their things properly unpacked, or a corner they can call their own. I am sure, my dear Stella, as I often say, to you and Harcourt too, I hope some good will come of all this travelling, for to my nind the pleasantest part of the journey will be when I get out safely at my own door. There is Roland, who thinks just the same; so wild as he was to go marching, nobody knows where, all by himself, when he started—and see how soon he grew tired of it. What should you have done, my dear boy, if you had not found us?"

"I cannot imagine, aunt. Let us drop a veil on so frightful a probability."

"I am sure, Miss Egerton," his aunt when on, "if you only knew how hard it is to make out what young people really wish from one day's end to another, you would pity me. There is Roland, you see, for one, and Harcourt is just such another; all in a hurry to go here, there, and everywhere one day, and another with his legs up on the sofa, quite affronted if you ask him to go into a shop. And as to Stella—oh, well, I must not be hard on her, dear child." (Stella had moved across the room by this time, and the speaker's voice dropped confidentially.) "You can see, I dare say, what is going on among us; there is no hiding these things, and when young people's heads are running on that subject, you cannot expect them to know their own minds, can you? You wouldn't know your own."

Marion was spared the difficulty of reply by a sharp remark of Stella's that she was dropping with fatigue, and that if mamma had done with her confidences, she should be glad to go to bed; on which hint the party obediently dispersed—how soon Mrs. Porchester was

allowed to go to sleep, must, nevertheless, remain an open subject of inquiry.

It was Mr. Saville's habit to take an egg beaten up in wine in his room before undressing ; and Marion having prepared it for him once, he had never fancied it again from any one else. It had thus become a regular custom of hers to go into his apartment before retiring to her own ; and though his moods were variable, sometimes silent, sometimes playful, sometimes depressed, he always treated her with a kindness that showed he took pleasure in her attendance. On the present occasion he seemed more tired than usual, and sat without speaking, till she had nearly accomplished her task.

"I wonder," he observed, at last, with some deliberation, "if Miss Porchester ever did such a thing as that."

"Probably not," said Marion ; "she is one of those people whom everybody else would wait upon, as a matter of course. I should do so at once—I could not help it."

"Ay," said he, "the world is made up of rulers and servants ; and Miss Stella has the making of an Eighth Harry in her self-will. I thought I saw something in your face to-night, though, which was not all subservient admiration."

"Only when she spoke so sharply to her mother. I could not imagine how she could bear to do it."

"No, she does not come up to your ideal of filial duty, I dare say ; but Marion, my dear, we must own, between ourselves, that her worthy mother is not exactly a model of wisdom. What could she have been twaddling to you about all the evening ? I wondered at your patience ; but I did detect a yawn now and then, which showed you were mortal. We will manage better for you to-morrow, or those young fellows will be doing something desperate. There, take care, or you will spoil my supper for the first time in your life. I did not mean to make your hand shake at such a crisis."

The young lady made no immediate reply,—perhaps because her attention was absorbed in the completion of her services ; but when she handed the glass to Mr.

Saville, she observed that Mrs. Porchester had been telling her several stories about her servants, in whom she seemed to have been singularly unfortunate—they all began so well and ended so badly.

“That is a peculiarity not confined to cooks and housemaids,” said he, leaning back in his chair, and playing with his spoon; “to begin well is not difficult—at least, when you have no money.”

“Is money a hindrance?”

“A terrible one.” He sipped his draught mechanically, and put down the glass. “Marion, those are two fine young men, those Clarendons.”

“Both?” inquired she.

“Well, Roland has more of the muscular Christian, perhaps, but Harcourt would be his match where pluck and skill were concerned. He has a rare brain of his own, and I should imagine a tremendous temper.”

“I hope Miss Porchester will be happy with him.”

“I hope she may, if she wishes it. That she is not happy without him, however, is all that any one can surmise. Don’t run away with any hasty notions; things are not so far advanced as you seem to fancy.”

“Mrs. Porchester gave me to understand —”

“She may give what she pleases; I only tell you what I know to be fact. I had a long talk with Wray about the whole family; it quite took me back to my young days. *Ay de mi!* I have those boys’ father before my eyes as plainly as I have you. He was a prince—more, for princes forget; but he never would. We were three of us—Clarendon, Brudenell, and I—who pulled together as boys and men, and shoulder to shoulder, felt we were a match for the world. Clarendon in his grave is not more effectually dead to me than Brudenell in his parsonage; and it is too late now to think of a resurrection.”

It was so rare for him to show any emotion, or to speak of his own past, that Marion, though touched and interested, hardly knew how to answer. Her eyes invited further confidence, and he soon went on, half to her, half to himself. “Yes, we three had a rare life at one

time, and thought nothing in the world should ever prevent our going through it arm in arm. What fools we are when we are young ! We believe then in everything—in love, in friendship, in man's truth, in woman's divinity, in parson's teaching—when we are as old as I am, Marion, we find out what they are all worth."

Had this been said to his wife—such things had been more than once—she would have drooped her head, and allowed it to pass in outward acquiescence and inward sorrow ; but Marion was young and fearless in her belief, and she uttered an expression of almost indignant disapproval, that seemed rather to amuse than offend him. " You will be a niece after Julian Brudenell's own heart, in spite of all the mischief I am supposed to have done you. And I do not mind owning to you, Marion, that I have often lately wished I could, for half an hour at least, feel as you do—as your mother did. No, do not look at me so eagerly ; it is nothing to build a hope upon ; I am none the better for it—perhaps the worse ; but when those young fellows were talking of their home, and their plantations and covers, and all the old country I remember so well, and Brudenell in his pulpit on Sunday—it did come into my head very strongly, how much I should like to be in England once more."

" Oh, dear sir—if we could but go back there to live !" exclaimed Marion, the water rushing to her eyes at this unexpected echo of her own yearning wishes, " that would be happiness ! "

" You think so ? Well, I own when I have thought of the hedgerows, and green lanes, and turf, I have hankered after them before—but not as I do now. I dare say it could be managed ; if a friend or two would come forward, one could compromise some things, and old scrapes are pretty well forgotten by this time ; no one would care to hinder me now ; and if you, Marion, were only married, with a good house of your own, you would give the old man a seat in the chimney-corner for the remainder of his days, I know."

She drew nearer to his chair, and gently caressed his hand. " I hope you do not mean to wait for that."

"I should like to *see* it, Marion. I should like to know you were well married. You are an anxious charge, my dear."

"I am afraid I am a trouble to you, sir."

"You are—a heavy trouble; for whenever I look in your face, I am reminded of all I owe you. Do you know how much richer you would have been if I had broken my neck thirty years ago, when I rode my last steeple-chase? No, you don't—how should you? but I do; and it makes me feel to-night like a thief—almost a penitent one."

Marion pressed his hand, and murmured that he was not to talk so—he knew—

"Yes, I know you are Helen's own child, and as unselfish as she was; and if I live I will requite you, and we will ride on English turf together, or sleep under it, before Christmas—that we will. Now good night, my dear, or Auguste will think the world is coming to an end, and that would suit the rascal's account as little as it would mine."



CHAPTER IV.

BADEN-BADEN.

MARION was the first of the party at the breakfast-table the next morning, and while waiting for the rest, had leisure to think over what had been said the night before. Not that she had not thought of it already; in her prayers, in her dreams, the hope so often disappointed, now so unexpectedly revived, had been vividly present, giving her life new colour and shape; but now she could bring the light of the outer world to play upon it, it was easier to judge of its probabilities of fulfilment. That which her mother had striven for so long in vain, was it now about to be granted to her? That there were many difficulties in the way, she was well aware, but whether they were insuperable or not, she had but scanty means of judging. Mr. Saville rarely

mentioned any matters of business, except when he wanted money ; and if her mother knew the real state of his affairs, she never did more than hint at them.

“ To go back to England—to see Uncle Brudenell again—to visit my father’s grave—to know Mr. Saville was doing what she so longed for him to do, and was happy and contented—may I dare to hope for so much at once ? Yes, if it is good for me, I know I may. I wonder how people get through long lives of trouble and disappointment who have not that comfort to keep them up. And yet some do. It must be that they are supported without knowing it. He does not always wait to be asked before He gives us His good things.”

“ You put us all to shame, Miss Egerton,” said Harcourt Clarendon, entering as this last thought passed through her mind. “ I did not expect any of you ladies would be ready for an hour. Mine will not, I’ll answer for it. It is our peculiar style of travelling, that we are generally too late for everything ; but I do not know that we get on the worse for it. You, I suppose, are more than half continental in your habits and hours ?”

“ If it is continental to be early in the morning, I may say so, perhaps ; but I would rather believe it was English.”

“ Your expatriation, then, has not cured you of the national weakness ?”

“ Is it a weakness to favour your own country ?”

“ What a question ! Do you not know that all those local and individual preferences are exploded now ? They went out of fashion with the John Bull in top-boots, and a white great-coat, and a bull-dog, whom we used to see on the European stage, offering his wife for sale in Smithfield. We have begun to discover that our grandfathers and grandmothers were not as wise as they made us believe ; and, in consequence, we repudiate all their opinions, as our grandchildren, if we have any, will repudiate ours. Such is life, Miss Egerton, though living among the barbarians here, you may not have learned it yet.”

“ No,” said she, “ that I certainly have not. I should

hold an opinion the more sturdily that it had been held by one I respected and loved."

"Exactly; and half the belief of the world rests on no better foundation, if people only had the honesty to confess it; but few have courage enough for that. Well, Roland," as his brother came in at that moment, with his hands full of flowers, "you have foraged to some purpose. Thank you," coolly taking a choice bunch of roses from his hand; "just what I wanted. What a comfort it is to have a little brother to do one's errands. May I offer you these, Miss Egerton? The boy has not many good qualities, but he just knows a peony from a buttercup. You may generally trust him about flowers."

Marion accepted the fragrant gift with sincere pleasure, and half buried her face in the glowing petals, still fresh with the morning dew; while Harcourt disposed of the rest of the bouquet in the plates of his aunt and cousin.

"You deserve flowers, Miss Egerton," said Roland, "for you enjoy them for their own sakes. Now Stella only cares to have them given her."

"The giving may add to their attraction. I am not going to dispute that," said Marion; "but these roses are quite above such external assistance. It is quite a pity to expose them to the heat and dust of the railroad."

"I wish I had a handful off our Morlands rose-trees for you. There are none like them, as I hope to hear you acknowledge. Ah, you may well look surprised at my impertinence; but I have a confession to make, Miss Egerton. My room is next to Mr. Saville's, and as the walls seem to be made of brown paper, I could not help overhearing some of your conversation last night."

She was rather confounded at this, not being quite sure whether more had not been said than was meant for the public ear.

"It was our fault for forgetting the thin partition," she said; "but perhaps you will tell me how much reached you."

"Enough to make me exceedingly happy. You **both** talked of coming to England."

"To England?" repeated Harcourt. "May I ask if it was your proposal, or Mr. Saville's?"

"It was his plan, but it has long been my wish. I dare not think of it too much; he may have changed his mind this morning."

"To England—anywhere in particular?"

"Oh, nothing was spoken of decidedly; but the truth is, he has begun to long for the old scenes he remembers so well, and of which you remind him. I am right, am I not, in understanding that you are intimate with my uncle, Mr. Brudenell?"

"We ought to be; he is our parish clergyman, and was my father's best friend."

"Have you ever heard him speak of Mr. Saville?"

"Yes, occasionally. Now, Miss Egerton, pray take care what you ask me next."

"Do not be afraid," she said, looking down. "I know there has been great unhappiness, and, I believe, misunderstanding; but all I know of my uncle is so good, I cannot help thinking he would be glad to forget the past, and see him once more."

"It is not for me to offer an opinion; I believe as you do, that if it is a matter of self-forgetting, Brudenell would be ready enough; but I am afraid there has been more than misunderstanding. Forgive my being plain-spoken."

She looked at him wistfully, almost with fear. Roland eagerly interposed with assurances that dear old Brudenell was the kindest fellow in the world, and Mrs. Brudenell the best woman, and that he would answer for both, that they would only be too delighted at any arrangement that brought her near them. Not that he had ever heard them say so, exactly, but he remembered now quite well how savage Mrs. Brudenell was when he went to see her once, and there was a letter about her niece—that she was not coming to England. "I little knew then," added he, "that I should meet that niece one day, and so I thought nothing more about it, till I found out who

you were ; but I can tell you, she was so angry then, she could only be pleased now."

Marion doubted ; Harcourt said nothing. " At all events, we shall know in a few days," said Roland, presently, " for I owe her a letter."

" You correspond with my aunt, then ?"

" Oh yes ; that is, I promised to write, and forgot all about it, if you call that corresponding. A pretty trimming she will give me, unless the news I can send her now puts her in too good humour. Can I deliver any message ?"

" Thank you, no ; I must not venture yet. It may all end in nothing, as other plans have done. I dare not be sanguine."

She seemed to fear she had said too much, and turned away to greet Mrs. Porchester and Stella, who had entered while she was speaking. However, the latter had overheard the last sentence, and inquired with some curiosity to what it referred, and, as soon as she knew, was pleased to say it was a very sensible idea, and did Mr. Saville credit. And Mr. Saville coming in directly afterwards, was rather amused to find his vision being discussed openly by the party, each of whom, Harcourt excepted, had a suggestion to make, an inquiry to put, or a counsel to offer, received by him with a smiling complaisance, that reassured Marion's failing courage. It was something gained that he could speak of it at all to others, and if only Harcourt Clarendon would not look so impenetrably grave, she could almost allow her hopes to breathe freely. But Harcourt said not a word, and seemed carefully to shun meeting her eyes.

It happened, in the course of that day's journey, that a change of arrangements gave her a place by his side, and she found courage, after considerable hesitation, to utter the fear that haunted her—the fear that Mr. Clarendon knew more than he liked to acknowledge—some insuperable difficulty in the way of her wishes. Would he be kind enough to tell her if it were so ? She believed she ought to know the truth, as otherwise she might make mistakes from ignorance.

"I warned you, Miss Egerton, to be careful what you asked me."

"I would be careful, but I am too ignorant to judge whether I ought to ask you or not."

"Do not be in a hurry to part with your ignorance. I assure you there is no pleasure in too much knowledge."

"I beg your pardon," said she, gravely, and she drew back, regretting she had ventured so far on so short an acquaintance; while he sat for the rest of the way without stirring or speaking, a symptom well known to his friends as betokening a coming purpose, but to Marion only a proof of his being offended.

It was late in the evening when they reached the hotel at Baden, where Louis had engaged their rooms, and where Mr. Saville seemed well known, and was greeted with special civility. There appeared no hesitation on his part, or Auguste's, with regard to expense; it was wonderful how little trouble money matters ever gave them. Miss Egerton might occasionally look anxious, and express a doubt; but her opinion went for so little, she might as well have withheld it altogether. The one who purveyed for the expenditure was the last consulted as to its amount. The party were sufficiently tired to be glad to disperse as soon as their late meal was finished; but Harcourt gave Roland a hint, and the brothers were presently sauntering along the picturesque Allée, by the side of the gay little river, now reduced to its summer proportions, but singing as merrily over the stones as if it shared Mr. Saville's philosophy.

After walking a few paces, Harcourt put his hand into his brother's arm.

"Look here, Roland," he began.

"Well, old fellow, what is it? Are you going to apologise for behaving like a dog in the manger all this blessed day, neither enjoying yourself nor allowing anybody else to do it?"

"How have I hindered you?"

"I like that, when you got Miss Egerton up into a corner, and sat sulking the whole way, as if you hated

her, while I would have given my eyes to be in your place!"

"Keep your eyes, my boy; you will want all the light they can give you in the road you are going."

Roland plucked a leaf from a tree they were passing, and twisted it into half-a-dozen shapes before he observed, not with strict truth, that he did not know what that meant.

"You don't? Then I need not trouble myself. I thought it was the wish of your heart that Mr. Saville should take Miss Egerton to live in England, within an easy distance of Morlands."

"Harcourt, do not speak in that tone—it is no joking matter to me. My happiness for life is at stake."

"I am afraid it is, indeed. Roland, my boy, I am sorry for you; but it is madness, and must not be thought of."

"Who put that into your head? Did Wray?"

"Wray only confirmed what I knew already. He said it was only too certain that he had spent everything he could get out of his wife, and is living now on her daughter. I know how he served his friends—the poor girl asks if there is any reason why Brudenell should not be glad to see him. How could I tell her the truth—that his conduct to Brudenell was such, it required all his sweetness of disposition to speak of him without bitter words? It is not that he is a bad-hearted fellow, I believe; but he is a second Sheridan in money matters, and has no sense of honour where £. s. d. are concerned."

"Well, he has not asked you for anything yet, at any rate."

"He has not, certainly; but how is he to compound with his creditors, as Wray says, without help, and a good deal of help, too? I know what this sudden revival of my father's memory means, perfectly well, and have no fancy to copy him in that respect, whatever I might wish in others."

"Do you think it could be arranged for him to go back and live near us then?"

"I suppose it could, if any one were weak enough to help him, and if those he injured chose to overlook the past. How I could ever ask him into my father's house I do not quite see, but if he were my neighbour, I suppose I should have to do it; and a bad day it would be for us all. Roland, my boy, I want you to make a sacrifice—I want you to go away—anywhere that you please—at any expense that you please—only go, and go at once, to-morrow, if you can."

"I never heard of such a thing. I would not give you a farthing for the finest country in the world if I had to leave Marion Egerton behind. Your care comes too late, Noll, thank you all the same."

"What do you know of her—what can you know, beyond that she has a pleasant manner and bright eyes?"

"I know that I love her, and that is enough; and what she wishes I will try to give her, and whoever she cares for I will care for too."

"And for one who cares for *you*, you will do nothing."

"Don't say that, Harcourt; it is not fair—it is not true. You know I would do anything to please you that I could; but this is more than any one should ask. I might say, in return, that you, who know how deeply my happiness is concerned, if you cared for me, would help instead of hindering."

"You think it would be a brotherly act on my part to pay Saville's debts?"

"No, indeed; but you might help—you might try what could be done, and give him this one chance of ending his days in peace and comfort. Whatever he may have been formerly, he is altered now, and if our father loved him so much, there must be something in him worth loving. I am sure, if he were alive, he would do it; and you stand in his place, Noll, as nobody else could; and money is nothing to you. Let us screw somehow or other, and keep fewer horses. I will give up hunting, and everything, if that will do it."

"Give up hunting? I shall begin to think you are in earnest soon."

"And why should I not be in earnest? I never was, if I am not now."

"And so am I, Roland, when I once more beg you to get the better of this. I treat you as a man, you see, and do not laugh at it as boyish folly; and I look for a man's conduct in return."

"A man's part is to stand by the woman he loves, and by her friends for her sake. I mean to stand by Mr. Saville, and those who care for me will do the same."

"Then I have no more to say," was Harcourt's answer, and he proved it by his silence all the rest of the walk.

He had laid aside his moodiness, however, when the party met next morning, and were discussing their plans of amusement for the day; for Stella, having begun to lament she had neither horse nor habit for an excursion, he not only volunteered to see whether such things could be obtained, but actually set off on the errand alone, rejecting all offers of assistance from Gervase or Roland. In about an hour he returned, announcing his success, and that two riding-dresses would be sent with the horses immediately. Marion was not prepared for this, having no idea of such an expense being incurred on her account, and looked at Mr. Saville in some dismay for help; but he only smiled pleasantly, as if it were all a matter of course, and hoped she would enjoy herself.

"I have never seen you ride, my dear, but I have no doubt you can do anything you try."

"I have not ridden since I was quite a child. I am afraid I shall acquit myself very badly, and spoil Miss Porchester's pleasure," said Marion, not sure whether she were frightened or pleased.

"If you will trust yourself to me, Miss Egerton," said Harcourt, "I think I can answer for your being neither in danger of hurting yourself, nor of hindering other people's enjoyment. As I chose the horses, I am responsible for their being safe."

"If Clarendon undertakes for your safety, my dear," added Mr. Saville, "I shall have no anxiety about you.

Take care of her, Harcourt, my dear fellow, for I should find her hard to replace, and I have not as much faith in your cattle as I have in yourself."

"I promise not to leave Miss Egerton's bridle unless at her special desire," said Harcourt; and he kept his word, leaving Stella entirely to the other two, and baffling all Roland's somewhat transparent devices to change places. "One at a time is enough for a lesson," he said; "Miss Egerton will only be puzzled with two teachers at once. I have made myself responsible for her safety, and I will trust it to no one else. Your rein a little shorter, Miss Egerton—just let him feel it—that will do. I can hardly believe you have not been in the saddle for so long—you seem quite at home in it."

If Marion had been consulted whether she would like such an arrangement, she would have replied in the negative, as she felt rather shy and nervous with Harcourt Clarendon, and was happy and at ease with his brother; but when her ride was over, and she thought of all that passed, she was surprised to find how pleasant it had been, and how openly she had talked. He had led her on, she knew not how, to speak of herself, of her mother, of her past life, her habits, wishes, studies, and occupations, unconscious how much light she was throwing on the treatment she had received, or how every ingenuous revelation confirmed her listener's opinion of the weakness or selfishness of her guardians. She was almost ashamed, when she came to think of it, that she had been so egotistical, and to Mr. Clarendon, of all people, who had sat by her side in such uninviting silence yesterday; but he had been so kind, took so much interest in all she said, and put so many questions, how could she help herself? She only hoped she had not tired his patience.

It did not appear that she had, for he devoted himself to her the whole evening, and Roland hardly got in a word. What Stella thought of this, was not apparent, for Mr. Saville, who seemed more charmed with her every hour, so absorbed her attention, she hardly vouchsafed to look at any one else. In the arrangements of the next few days, in rides, drives, and excursions, the same order was

preserved ; Harcourt being the most powerful of the party, it was easy for him to arrange as he pleased, and his cousin seemed to have no present inclination to interfere. Roland rebelled and chafed, and Mrs. Porchester wondered and remonstrated, but equally without result ; and both at last came to the private determination to speak to Marion the first time they could find her alone. Mrs. Porchester's opportunity came first. It was the evening of a very hot day, when they had all been seeking coolness and refreshment under the trees of the Allée, in preference to mixing with the crowd by the Conversation Haus ; and the gentlemen having fallen in with some acquaintance, who had detained them with a political discussion, the old lady had, as she thought, been very artful and clever in professing extreme exhaustion, and securing Marion's ready arm. "We will go a little farther, away from all these people, and sit down a minute till I have recovered myself, if you do not mind, my dear."

Marion was willing enough, as she habitually was, to agree to any proposal made by her elders, and was soon sitting dutifully by her side, though she had by this time grown sufficiently accustomed to her conversation not to give it that undivided attention she had so scrupulously paid at first ; her thoughts had wandered far away from the scene before her, when they were called back by the words : "And so, my dear, as I knew your poor mother, and as I cannot help taking an interest in you, I thought I would just mention it as I should to my own child, only she never will let me mention anything, and never did, since she could speak, and all young people are pretty much alike in that respect, and so was your poor mother, as I well remember hearing, when her second marriage was talked of, and everybody said a wilful woman must have her own way. And her own way she had, to be sure, poor dear, only she sacrificed herself and you, and her money, and all her friends to Mr. Saville, and no one can say a word against his manners, for a more perfect gentleman never breathed in this world, and Stella can bear me witness I always say so. But then one's own

child must come first, of course ; and where her happiness is at stake, one must speak out, even when it is very unpleasant to one's feelings, as I am sure it always is to mine to speak at all, and as I often say, it is only from a sense of duty I ever open my lips, and that everybody must do me the justice to acknowledge."

Marion assented civilly, wondering what all this meant, and what would come next.

" And so, my dear, as my dear nephew and Stella have so long been on those terms that one has a right to name them together, and like brother and sister they are sometimes, and sometimes do quarrel to that degree that I hardly know how to bear myself, and what they will ever do when they are married is more than I can tell, or any one else, if they don't agree better ; but, as I was saying, they are made for one another, and if I know Stella is mistress of Morlands, why the sooner I am in my grave the better, for she would never want anything more, and would then be satisfied, and so should I of course. So, my dear, you don't mind my plain speaking, do you ? I always think it is better not to use too many words when one wants to be clearly understood."

" I beg your pardon," Marion began, " but I do not quite understand what you mean."

" Very natural, my dear, very natural. When I was as young as you are, I should not have understood it either, I dare say, and it is better to be a little slow in those things than too quick, as so many girls are now-a-days. Dear me, before Stella was fifteen, she had her head so full of herself and her admirers, I never could do anything with her ; she would just amuse herself her own way, and always will, and what the end of it will be, nobody knows. Here she comes with dear Roland. We were just speaking of you, Stella, my love."

" I am much flattered ; though I doubt if more than one of you has done me the honour. Do come and walk, mamma ; you will be much less tired than sitting here to catch cold under these trees." And Miss Porchester took her mother's arm, and regardless of her remonstrances, drew her on. Roland, as she expected, was by Marion's side in a moment.

"At last I can speak to you, Miss Egerton; I have hardly exchanged a word with you the last two days; and I was beginning to think I must have given you offence."

"I am afraid, if there is any fault, it must be mine. Mrs. Porchester has been talking very mysteriously to me, as if I had done something wrong—but I cannot understand what it is."

"No, I should wonder if you could. It would puzzle anybody to understand you could do wrong at all."

"You have all been so kind to me," she went on, quietly ignoring the compliment, "and Mr. Saville has been in such good spirits, I have enjoyed these last few days very much, and it would grieve me to think I had been all the time causing any of you annoyance. What is it? What have I done?"

"If you have enjoyed yourself, it is all right," said Roland, with a great effort. "You like this place, then?"

"How can I help it? It is so cheerful, and the country is so lovely this weather, and every excursion is such a treat to one who has led such a quiet life as mine. I wonder if anybody ever grows tired of looking at those hills!"

"You can admire them after the Jungfrau?"

"Yes, indeed. She is cold and grand; these are bright and beautiful. I remember when I used to dream of scenery like this, but with very little hope of seeing it, and to such advantage. Can one ever grow tired of such a place?"

"Easily enough; there was a man near me just now execrating the hour he set eyes upon it, and vowing never to come back. He had not been spending his time as you have. The Tables have more charm for some than the woods and rocks."

"You do not play, I hope?"

"No, I see no fun in it, and I promised Harcourt I never would. You and he have become great allies, lately. What do you think of him?"

She laughed at the abruptness of the question. "Could

I tell you, his brother, if I thought him very disagreeable?"

"No chance of that," said he, with a sigh. "He is a very good fellow, but he will turn you round his finger, if he has a mind to try."

"I should imagine he was used to being obeyed, and indeed, I always feel as if I must do whatever he bids me."

"Well, to confess the truth, I feel that myself, but I do not always practise it. One must stand up for one's own opinion, at times, or there would be no end of it. A man cannot go on obeying for ever. Not but that he is all that is kind and good," he added, with a pang of honest compunction; "you do not know what a brother he is, nor how much I owe him. He never grudges me a single thing I wish for, or thinks I can have too much; and for all that, he looks, sometimes, as if he cared for nobody, and as if everything bored him; let him once attach himself, no matter to what, and it is for life—he never changes, and it is wonderful how creatures attach themselves to him."

"Not very wonderful," observed Marion; "we all love those who love us."

"I wish I could think so." Roland's voice had dropped suddenly. "I wish it only required it on one side to ensure it on the other."

To this Miss Egerton made no reply, and a silence ensued of some duration. Roland longed for a look or a word, to encourage him to proceed, and receiving none, wished the words unsaid. His heart swelled painfully, as with the rising conviction of her indifference, came the doubt whether Harcourt might not be preferred—Harcourt, who had a fortune to give her, and was so awfully clever besides—if he chose to stand in his way, how could he ever get a chance? But this was only a moment's bitterness; Harcourt never acted shabbily, or underhand; he would have told him at once if it had been so; it might be only his old kindness, carried a little to excess, that had made him keep them apart, perhaps just to try if Roland were in earnest—and now he had been tried

nearly three days, who could say he was not? But he would not vex the old boy by acting without his consent; he would wait another day before he risked anything, and meanwhile Miss Egerton must not be made uncomfortable by any presumptuous speeches. He turned to her with a semblance of cheerful ease, making some trivial remark on the beauty of the evening, which restored her voice at once, and they were soon proceeding amicably enough, keeping clear of all dangerous ground by talking about Morlands, and the Vicarage, and Roland's own pursuits and habits, and all that he would show and do for her, when that happy, but visionary, arrangement was completed which was to make them neighbours, and, of course, intimate friends.

"But how is it," Miss Egerton asked, in the midst of a glowing description of the delights of country sports and amusements, all of which she was to share, "that you have so much time for all this? Are you always at home?"

"When I am not in London, or visiting, or walking with you at Baden-Baden. I see what you think—that I must be very idle. It really is not the case; I have plenty to do. Harcourt trusts the stable and dogs entirely to my superintendence; and I am head-gardener into the bargain, and get him prizes sometimes, that he would never win without me. I can assure you I am nearly as much master as he is."

"That I can understand, but I had supposed you were intended for some profession."

"Of course I must do something for myself some day. We have talked about it, but it has always ended in my staying where I was. Harcourt hates the idea of my leaving him, and as he always says there is enough for us both, why should I work for more?"

"Is there no such thing as working for duty?"

"I suppose there must be, as I cannot imagine any one doing it for pleasure. If I thought it my duty, I should work too. Are you very much shocked?"

"It is not for me to presume to give an opinion, where I know so little."

" But I wish for your opinion ; I am sure you think the worse of me for being in no profession."

" I cannot help feeling sorry——" she began ; then stopped.

" Will you tell me why ?" he said, his heart bounding with pleasure.

" Because an idle man is so miserable !"

There was an earnest compassion in her voice that betrayed a deeper feeling than she was aware of showing. It touched Roland, knowing what he knew ; and for once he hesitated to answer, even in self-defence. Again there was mutual silence, each full of the thoughts they had stirred up, and Roland was only roused by seeing Harcourt near, to whisper in some confusion, " Thank you for the hint ; a word of advice from you is, indeed—I shall not forget it—you shall see whether I am an idler at heart—I will deserve your good opinion, at any rate, whether I have it or not."

There was no time for more ; Stella and her mother had already reached Harcourt, and the former was taxing him with faithlessness and desertion. He answered more curtly than usual, and as soon as he could, moved to the other side of Marion. She asked where Mr. Saville was. He gave her a quick, pitying glance.

" He has met with a friend, and is gone to the Rooms with him," was the reply.

" Do you know who it is ?"

" A Monsieur Lepelletier. What ? Is he an acquaintance of yours ?"

" I never saw him, but I know who he is. What shall we do ?"

She was very much agitated, and trembling all over. Harcourt drew her arm in his, and she felt him press her hand.

" Do not be uneasy," he whispered ; " trust to me ; only let us understand each other clearly. This man is a notorious gambler—you are aware of that ?"

" I am, indeed ; I hoped he would never see him again. He made him so wretched once !"

" That I can easily believe ; well, they are gone to

the tables now, no doubt. Has Mr. Saville much about him?"

"Not much, I think; but more than he can afford to lose."

"Then do not be unhappy about him; if he does lose the florins in his pocket it may do him good. He cannot risk much, unless by borrowing, and I will go and see he does nothing dangerous. Roland, take care of Miss Egerton." And, with another pressure of her hand, he plunged into the crowd, and was quickly lost to their view.

"Shall I take you in?" asked Roland, anxiously.

"Oh no; I must wait for Mr. Saville. Cannot we go to the promenade, to be nearer the Rooms? If he saw me, perhaps he would come away."

"We can but try; take my arm. Gervase, keep with us, will you? We are going to have some ice, if we can find a table. Stella, you will come?"

"What is it?" whispered Miss Porchester. "Anything gone wrong?"

"Saville," in the same tone, "is gone to play, and Harcourt to take care of him."

"This is serious; we must make the best of it. Dear Miss Egerton," coming nearer to Marion, and addressing her with more kindness than usual, "do not look so miserable; it is what everybody does, and nobody thinks of suicide. You do not mean to say you are really making yourself wretched about his throwing away a handful of gulden, which, after all, he may win?"

Marion could not answer, her heart was too full. She moved on, clinging mechanically to Roland's arm, conscious of the crowd, the heat, the music, and the voices, but as one is conscious of the stir in the outer world when confined to a sick-bed; and hardly knowing, when seated at last with her companions at a table, by what means they had reached it. It might be, as Miss Porchester said, only a matter of a small loss; but it was not the money she was thinking of. She would gladly have sacrificed much more than she knew was in his power, could she by that means have kept him from temptation.

Her thoughts had gone back to her mother's dying bed, and the solemn promise given her there—the only promise wrung from his remorseful tenderness—that he never would yield to Lepelletier's influence again. At what a cost he had been extricated from it once, even Marion did not quite know; but she knew the promise had been given, and so earnestly, that both mother and daughter had relied on it: and now, on the first temptation, it was broken—broken against his own better judgment. It was only that morning he had been remarking on the folly of frequenting such places, and explaining to her the system by which the banks thrrove on the cupidity of visitors. He had spoken so kindly of the new life they would lead in England, and the refreshing change it would be to himself after his rambling, desultory pursuit of wearisome amusement; and she had wondered why such a prospect had been granted to her, that was denied to the one who had pined for it most. She had yearned to call her back from her rest to see it—could she do so now?

Little as Miss Porchester generally troubled herself about other people's feelings, she could not help noticing the expression of her face, and it moved her to pity and consideration. She kept her mother's notice from her by beguiling her into a history of a certain journey, twenty years ago, in which a black trunk, carefully corded and directed, studded with brass nails, and incessantly commended to the care of everybody who went near it, disappeared in the most unaccountable manner, and under very suspicious circumstances. It took a long time, as her daughter knew beforehand, to detail the advertising, inquiring, and hunting for this trunk, the futile hopes of its recovery, the endless expense of replacing all its multifarious contents, though for that matter, they never were and never could be replaced. "Especially that old India shawl that belonged to your grandmamma, Stella, and had cost nobody knows what when it was new, and every time I have the rheumatism I wish the trunk had been found, for anything so light, and warm, and soft, you cannot get now, let you pay what

you will, and I only wish it was on my shoulders this minute, I do indeed."

"The trunk, mamma?"

"No, nonsense—not the trunk; I said the shawl. Who ever wished to sit on a summer's evening with a trunk on her shoulders? And very delightful it is sitting here, and extremely cheerful and amusing, only these chairs are so hard and stiff, I ache as if I had walked to the Castle and back; and it is rather dull work when you don't know a soul to speak to but your own party, and half of them are at the other end of the place. I cannot think what has come to Harcourt, that he leaves us in this way."

"He has found some friends, most likely. He seems to meet some everywhere."

"And very pleasant it is to meet one's friends, especially in this cheerful way, and it would be a comfort to see a single face one knew among all these odd-looking people, dressed out like I don't know what, and where they pack all their dresses to come to the place I can't imagine, for some of them seem to wear half a dozen a day. There is a lady here I have noticed ever since we came; I see her perpetually walking and driving about, and never by any chance in the same dress. Half her life must be spent in pulling off one gown and putting on another."

With a little help, such conversation as this went on without compelling Marion either to join or listen; and, under cover of the music, Roland found occasional opportunities of administering some words of encouragement and kindness that helped her to endure—as she had often endured before, though never with so sore a heart. At length Stella's patience would hold out no longer, and she suggested that Gervase Wray should go and look for the recreants, and scold them well. Gervase went as desired, and, after another long interval of suspense, returned rather out of breath, to apologise in Harcourt's name for the delay, and to say Mr. Saville was tired, and was gone home.

"Pretty behaviour, upon my word," said Stella, gaily;

"but such being the case, we have no choice but to go too. How well that overture was played, Miss Egerton, was it not? There is nothing else worth staying for, though, and mamma is growing chilly for want of her trunk. Take care of her, Mr. Wray, will you, and give me your other arm. Roland, go first with Miss Egerton. Tell me," in a whisper, holding Gervase Wray fast, while Mrs. Porchester was pinning her shawl, "has anything happened?"

There was only a minute before Mrs. Porchester looked round, but in that minute a word had been uttered that left Stella's face as white as Marion's had been before.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW CURATE.

"A LETTER from Roland at last! How he can have the face to write it, after all his fine promises, I cannot conceive; only those boys have impudence enough for anything," said Mrs. Brudenell, as she entered her husband's study, with the daily supply of correspondence. "He was to send a line from every place he stopped at, and this is the first I have received. He will hear of it when he comes home."

"You never expected more, did you, my love?"

"I did not expect half as much, but that has nothing to do with it. It is only a scrap, after all. Shall I read it to you?"

Mr. Brudenell, who was copying a manuscript, so full of corrections and interlining as to defy every eye but his own, nodded assent, and went on writing as she read.

"' Basle, July, 18—.

"DEAREST MRS. BRUDENELL,—What will you say to me for not having written sooner? I am so thoroughly ashamed, that I do not think I can ever try my skill in Jane's service again, unless the news I have to tell makes some amends. Just think of my luck in falling in with

my friend Maxwell in Paris, and being introduced by him to an acquaintance he had just made—Mr. Saville, my father's old friend——”

Mr. Brudenell's pen stopped; the reader went on hurriedly—“‘who was passing through with his step-daughter, your niece, Miss Egerton. They were very kind to me, and we saw a good deal of each other, and most charming I found them both.’ (Both! humph!) ‘Well, they went on to Switzerland, and I followed; and between ourselves, I found it so jolly dull alone, that I made out their route, and came up with them at Interlachen. Who should be at the same hotel but Harcourt and the rest, so we all joined company, and are now going to Baden-Baden. I am scribbling away while the ladies are putting on their hats; and Stella's hat, as you know, takes some time. I was up with the lark (if larks get up at all here, which I doubt, for I never hear any), to get flowers for them all, this morning. Miss Egerton is a real lover of flowers, and of beautiful scenery, and everything that is good and sweet, like herself. There, I have written it, and I mean to let it stay. I wish you could see her. She is the most fascinating, charming girl I ever saw; and I cannot help liking old Mr. Saville, he seems to have been so fond of my father. He actually talks of coming to live in England, near us. Miss Egerton's eyes were full of tears when they spoke of it; she longs for it so much. Would it not be delightful? Harcourt sees difficulties, but you know what a croaker the old boy can be when he chooses. I can't see why a man is never to have another chance because he has let one slip. Here come the ladies, and I must fly. I will finish at Baden.’

“And so I suppose he does, on another scrap of paper, with a villainous pen. This is dated some days later.

“‘I must finish this off, though I am almost ashamed to send it. Dearest Mrs. Brudenell, I can think of but one subject, and I know you are much too good and kind to laugh at me, or try and put me off, as Harcourt does. The old boy shakes his head about it, and wants me to go away, and will not see that my life's whole happiness is concerned, and that unless I gain Marion Egerton's

affections, I shall be the most miserable wretch in the world. I do not know what to think—she has hardly spoken to me all to-day; Harcourt watches over her as if he were afraid I should carry her off if he turned his back for a minute. I know he means it all for one's good, but it is uncommonly aggravating. I have been thinking very seriously about the expenses of a family, (Bless the boy, what next?) ‘and I want you, like the dearest of dear women that you are, to write and tell me exactly for how little two people could live in comfort. I am sure I spend three hundred a year on myself alone as it is; and if Harcourt allowed me that still, we could easily make it do. I should want very little of it when once I was married; a sure-footed pony for Marion I must have, as she enjoys riding, though she is not used to it, and looks so pretty when she is a little nervous, you have no idea. There is one at Morlands that would just do for her, if trained to carry a lady; I shall write to Graves about it. If you hear from Harcourt that I am out of my mind, you need not believe him. Wise as he is, he will be bowled over too, some day, for you were right and I was wrong, about his never marrying. Mr. Saville is much struck with him, and says he should enjoy nothing so much as to end his days near us—we remind him so of old days and old friends. I am called, so good-bye. Write by return of post, and tell me what you think.

“ ‘Yours ever,

“ ‘ROLAND CLARENDRON.’

“ What I think, indeed! There will be no difficulty in telling you *that*, Master Roland; and you know it already, by the coaxing way in which you try to make me see things in a different light. I shall write at once, and tell him we advise Harcourt to shave his head and put on a strait-waistcoat as soon as possible; not that it is a joking matter. I wish he had never gone abroad at all, if this is to be the consequence.”

“ It is well for us we cannot see consequences,” said Mr. Brudenell, who had resumed his pen.

“ I cannot understand that. If I had foreseen that

Roland would meet George Saville, and lose his heart to that self-willed child, who would not be advised by you or anybody, I should certainly have done my best to prevent his going."

"And therefore it was better that you should *not* know, my dear Maria."

"Julian, my dear, if you have a fault, it is that you are not only too good to live, but too wise to be intelligible. If you can find it a matter of rejoicing that a boy with no experience should fall into the hands of a man with no principle, I can only say, it is none to me ; and if everything that happens is right, we may as well sit cross-legged, like the Turks, at once, and say it is the will of Allah when the house tumbles about our ears for want of a hod of mortar."

"Very true, my love," said Mr. Brudenell, as he mended his pen ; "suppose we do ?"

"Yes, yes, I know what you are thinking, by your tone; how sorry I shall be presently, and how I shall come in to say I am always wrong, and you are always right; but this time I shall do nothing of the sort. What is the use of plain common sense, if one is never to see that certain things, leading to certain results, had better never have been done? I dare say you are delighted that George should talk of coming to live near you : you would like nothing better."

"I wonder how long you would hold out, if he did?" said Mr. Brudenell, shaking his head.

"I? Only let him try his smooth ways on me, that is all. I know how it is—you would have him here, sponging upon you and the boys, and between you, you would pay most of his debts, and everything you have would be at his disposal, and nothing good enough for him—and if he obliged you by going to church on Sunday, you would think you were quite rewarded. But that sort of thing would not suit me, I can tell you, and I will be a party to nothing of the kind ; so I shall begin a letter to Roland, which he may show if he pleases ; and as he asks me to say what I think, I shall do it so plainly, I cannot be misunderstood. You may smile, Julian, but I shall."

"Do, my love ; and let me know before you close the letter."

"Ah, you think I shall let you read it, and tear it up if you fancy it unkind. But I am not always going to be so weak, my dear."

"A woman," said Mr. Brudenell, "is like a bow—her strength lies in her pliability."

"If you taught that to poor Helen, I am not surprised that she behaved as she did," was the retort, more sharply spoken than usual, for the speaker's mind was sore on that topic, and she left the room without noticing the change on her husband's face. He laid down his pen as she closed the door, took off his glasses, and leaning back in his chair, with a heavy sigh, sat mechanically rubbing them for some time, while his thoughts were far away—thoughts that would dim their surface, rub them as he might.

He had just returned to his work when his wife came back.

"I am not at all sorry, and I am not come to say so," was her entering speech, "but I cannot write to-day; there are all the preserves to tie up, and I must settle about the cakes for the school-children, now the weather looks more settled. And here is Cecil Percival come to see you, so we will keep him to help. He is boiling over with grievances, and your superfluous satisfaction with things in general could not be better bestowed than in cooling him down, poor boy."

All young men were "boys" to Mrs Brudenell, but those who had been her husband's pupils were never supposed to be more than children in wisdom or experience; and a curate of two years' standing was treated in just the same off-hand manner as when he was a boarder in her house—laughed at, encouraged, scolded, or petted, as his case might seem to require. That this was not always agreeable to the pride or sensibilities of the recipient, may well be imagined; but her influence over them all had generally been too great in their boyhood to be quite shaken off when they became men; and some of her most confidential correspondents, if too far to be visitors,

were among the pupils who had given her most trouble, and received most plain truths from her in former days. Cecil Percival was a young man of good family, dependent on his own exertions at present, and for the future, on the good intentions of a rich uncle, in whose gift was a valuable family living. The Rector being very old, it had been the elder Mr. Percival's wish that his nephew should reside in the parish, and assist in the duty as curate; and this he had been doing for nearly a year.

He came into the study looking white with the heat of a broiling walk, and took the seat that was offered him, in silence. Mr. Brudenell held out his hand, and greeted him kindly, but asked permission to finish what he was about before beginning to talk.

"Of course, sir; work must be done," was the answer, with a half-murmured comment; "well for those who are allowed do it!"

Mrs. Brudenell gave him one of her quick glances, that took in at once his whole condition—the hot lips, dry tongue, thin hands, and thickly powdered clerical coat, cut more according to severest rule than to comfort or season. Her shoulders made a slight movement, expressive of pity mingled with provocation, and away she went, returning before the Vicar had begun his promised talk, with a plate of freshly-picked strawberries, which she set before her guest.

"The British Queens have a chance of ripening now, Percival, as there are no inquiring minds with inquisitive fingers pinching them before their time. Be so good as to eat those directly, and do not let me see any shirking, or you know the consequence."

The young man took the plate with due gratitude, tasted one of the strawberries, and put the rest down beside him.

"They are as good as ever, Mrs. Brudenell—like yourself." But he did not go on, and when she had left the room, pushed them farther out of reach. The Vicar wiped his pen, and drew his chair nearer. "And now, Percival, is there anything I can do for you?" he said, in the old courteous tone the young man knew so well,

and which young and old, according to their several claims, were equally sure of hearing. If he did not make pets of his pupils, he never rebuffed them; and as they grew into men, always remembered the fact as well as they did.

" You have done a great deal for me already, sir ; I want now to have my turn, and work for you. Will you take me as your curate ? "

" I thought it was a settled thing that you remained near your uncle, under Mr. Holmby. Mr. Percival spoke of it as quite a permanent arrangement, and that it gave him pleasure to see how popular you were among his people."

" Too popular," said the young clergyman, bitterly ; " they like me and my ways the best, and that does not suit Holmby at all. He and I have had some tremendous arguments about it, and we cannot agree, so it is better we should part."

" Must those always part who do not agree in everything ? The world is not large enough to hold us all separately."

" We should not take up much room, if our bodies were as narrow as some of our minds. It is come to this, Mr. Brudenell—Holmby's views and opinions are quite behind the age ; he does not think with us in a single respect ; and as he expects his curate to follow, and not to lead, he must find one of his own school who will run in his groove. I told my uncle so."

" Did your uncle wish you to stay ? "

" Yes, and to knock under to Holmby, and see the service done in a slovenly way, and the music a disgrace, and the church looking like a stone-cutter's shop, with all those hideous Pagan monuments—just because it has been so all his time. He says it is not for me to suggest or insist on alterations, even for the better. I should like to know who will, if I don't ! "

" When the living is yours, Percival, may be a better time."

" The living will never be mine now—my uncle told me as much. He said if I threw up the curacy for these

notions, he should not consider me fit to be the Rector. Of course I threw it up at once."

"Why?"

"Why, Mr. Brudenell? Do you suppose I would sell my conscience for a good income?"

"He did not bid for your conscience, that I can see. He probably meant, that you must learn to obey before you could rule."

"I hold my office in too high estimation to obey where I feel I ought to make a stand. Mr. Brudenell, you have not answered my question. You said the other day you were looking out for a curate. Will you try me?"

"I must consider of it, Percival; and without wishing to pain you, I must hear what your uncle and Mr. Holmby have to say on the matter."

"You may spare yourself the trouble, sir; they both said the same—that it would be the making of me. I know what they meant—they think I cannot live without my uncle's house to go in and out of as I please—he hinted as much more than once. Horses, and servants, and wine, and easy-chairs, are not necessities of life to any one; to a priest they are snares. I am glad to be quit of them altogether."

"Certainly my curacy will not offer you much in that way, Percival. An easy-chair we may find you, and a tidy maid, and a glass of sherry after dinner—nay, we may go as far as a gentle amble on your old friend Snowball."

"Quite unnecessary, sir. I consider luxuries inconsistent with my profession. We are all too self-indulgent, at the best."

"I am afraid so," said the Vicar, shaking his head; "but a wife is a strict ruler, Percival, and I should no more dare to dismiss my easy-chair, than I should venture to give warning to Jane."

"We are safer alone, then, sir."

"On that head I may have my own opinion, but will defer it. To speak plainly, I am rather doubtful whether you would like the office of curate here."

"I do not want to like it, sir; only to fill it as I ought."

"It is hard to do that as we ought, in which we do not put our hearts, Percival. You must love your work here, if you are to work well."

"I shall have privileges here, sir, that will help me. I shall not be chafed and fretted at every turn by prejudice and ignorance in authority, to which I am expected to submit."

"You are mistaken, Percival; I am in authority here, and expect to be minded, and I am very ignorant in many matters—in some, perhaps, in which you are well informed."

"Well, sir, well, you are liberal and kind, and allow a man to think, and to use his memory and his understanding; and if I have learned anything that you can profit by, I shall be glad to make it useful. Only let me try, for a year, at least."

"Have you brought your carpet-bag with you?"

"Yes."

"Then we shall have time to talk this over to-morrow. I must consult Mrs. Brudenell before deciding."

"May I go and ask her myself?"

"Not till you have eaten her strawberries, or she will certainly decline."

Percival turned from the tempting plate. "I would rather not; is there no sick child to whom I might carry them?"

"We have enough for you and our sick children too."

"I remember the cobbler's lame boy; he would enjoy them, I know, if I might run into the village with them."

"He is not allowed fruit now, but I am glad you mentioned him, as he was promised some wine. Excuse me one minute, my dear fellow; there is the Quarterly Review for you till I come back. Thank you for refreshing my bad memory."

"I may often do that," muttered the young man, when he was left alone; "in this place one may have a chance of being useful: Brudenell is one of the few

who will bear to see his juniors get before him, and allow that the world of thought has not stood still ever since his own opinions were formed." He walked across the room, looked critically at a print on the wall, returned to the table, and took up the Review. "Shallow thinkers, most of these popular essay writers, I fancy." It happened to open on an interesting article—one of those so easy to read, so difficult to write—and he soon found he must read it through. Tired with his long walk, he sat down in the Vicar's arm-chair, without thinking whether it were luxurious or not, and was soon lost to everything but his book. Unconsciously, however, he became aware of a tempting fragrance on the table before him, and without moving his eyes, his hands mechanically moved to the plate, and the fruit was at his parched lips before he had thought of his resolution. Once begun, it was not in human nature to stop, when fatigue and thirst urged continuance; and by the time he had finished the article, he had left only stalks in the plate. Full of the subject he had been studying, he leaned back for a minute to consider whether he quite approved the manner in which it had been handled, and how much might be advanced on the other side. The chair was comfortable, the room was quiet and cool—the only sounds that met his ear were of a soothing nature—and the consequence was that he fell fast asleep, so fast, that the Vicar's entrance did not rouse him. Mr. Brudenell quietly moved his portfolio, and taking another chair, went on with his work at a corner of the table. The clock struck, and the sleeper started up with an exclamation of dismay.

"Mr. Brudenell! I am really so ashamed, so disgusted with myself——!"

Mr. Brudenell went on writing his letter, and did not seem to hear. It was not till he was folding it up to place in the envelope, that he turned to his guest.

"I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, for keeping you so long."

"I am sure," Percival began, "it is I who ought to be ashamed."

"I have been speaking to Mrs. Brudenell," the Vicar went on, ignoring the apology as before, "and she is so glad to think you will be here to help her with the school-feast, I shall begin to suspect there has been some private conspiracy going on. So you stay with us for the present, and to-morrow I shall go over and see your uncle, and when I know his wishes, we will see if we can gratify yours."

The prospect of being exceedingly useful and acceptable, though only in the service of girls and boys, was some comfort to Percival; and he felt so grateful to his old friend for not laughing at him, he would have agreed to anything at that moment. All the rest of the day he was devoted to Mrs. Brudenell's service; assisting in preparations for the annual treat, and forgetting his grievances in the excitement of the spirited arguments that took place over everything they did. Whatever one began, the other objected to; then they disputed about it, till one gave way a little, and the other immediately went over to the opposite opinion, and the battle began again under the guise of civility—ending in a compromise between both opinions, each firmly believing in the conversion of the other.

With all this on her hands, it is not surprising that Mrs. Brudenell's letter to Roland was deferred; though she took occasion to assure her husband she was still of the same mind, and only waited till she had time to word the remonstrance in terms sufficiently strong. It was still unwritten, when Mr. Brudenell on the following afternoon drove his old white pony over to Durningham, to pay his promised visit to Mr. Percival.

He met the latter at his own park gate, and was received with a cordial greeting.

"The very man I wanted to see. I have been half-expecting, and two-thirds hoping you would call, only I know how much you have to do, Mr. Brudenell. If our youngsters were more like you, and did their work without so much talking about it, it would be a blessing to all parties. Will you come into the house, or would you like to walk?"

Mr. Brudenell preferred the latter, and at a whistle from the Squire, a boy ran out of the lodge, and took the old pony's reins, while the gentleinen walked up and down.

"Glorious weather for the harvest," said Mr. Percival; "I was rather afraid last night, the glass was down a little; but to-day it is steady again. What are they about at Morlands?"

"They have not begun yet."

"Ah, they want the master's hand over them; Graves is far from being a stupid fellow, but he is not man enough to be at the head of such an estate. I always tell young Clarendon he takes things too easily; you won't find me dawdling after ladies through Switzerland, with my crops left to chance. You can't be a farmer and an idle man too."

"Not to the same perfection, perhaps. You know your nephew is at my house?"

"I did not know, but I am glad to hear it. I am glad he is in such safe hands, for, to tell you the truth, he quite frightens us with his vagaries, and what he will end in becoming, is more than he knows himself. Look here, Mr. Brudenell," taking his arm as they walked on, "I always knew my good old friend Holmby was not quite up to the mark; too old and too shaky to get through what there is to do in this place; we have a lot of young lads growing up, who want a good active parson among them, just to show them their skulls are given them for something better than to fuddle with beer; and I always hoped this boy would be just what we wanted. I meant to give him the living when Holmby dies, and meanwhile I thought nothing could be better than that he should learn his work under him, and grow fond of the place and of the people, and know everybody, and that they should know him. My house was open to him whenever he liked, and he had every indulgence he could wish for; and at first, I will say, I was delighted with him. He had some of the modern ideas, that was a matter of course, but there was no harm in them--indeed, when one was uscd to it, we liked some of them

well enough—I am not one of those who think the Pope is coming directly the church bells ring on a week day, though I don't go myself as often as I might—and he has made the boys sing a great deal better than they did, and our church, at Christmas, thanks to him, was as pretty as you could wish to see. But somehow, for the last six months, he has not been the same. I don't know what books or papers he reads, but every week he has some new crotchet, something is wrong that we have always been doing, and it must be stopped, or somebody has been doing or proposing to do something a hundred miles off, and we must all do it directly—and he does not give one time to talk it over, or think about it, but screams into Holmby's deaf ear till the old man is half dead, and rushes over to me to complain he is never listened to, and never appreciated or understood; and he argues with the churchwardens about things *they* do not understand, though they do not choose to tell him so; and lectures the farmers when their heads are full of their hay, or their markets, and they have not a corner left for anything else, and when they don't jump at his ideas in a minute, declares he will carry them out in spite of them! The boy is never still—he neither eats, drinks, nor sleeps like a rational being, and if he had his own way, would let nobody else; the children are all devoted to him, but the master and mistress dread to see him come into the school—he always wants to try some new, wonderful plan, that next month, perhaps, has to be altered for something else. Poor old Holmby got fairly into a passion at last, and declared he was Rector here, and he would not be dictated to; and when Cecil came raging to me, I said he was perfectly right. And what is more, I shall not give him the living to make everybody miserable in the parish, and himself into the bargain. He is killing himself with worry, and irregular meals, and racing about, morning, noon, and night, as he has been doing lately; and it is of no use my having him here—he preaches to me on luxury and self-indulgence before the servants, and I know the fellows are bursting behind my back. It is not pleasant, at one's own table, to be

bullied by a youngster you have tipped at school—is it, now, Mr. Brudenell?"

"I should think not," said the Vicar, smiling.

"Now, if you were to come and say to me, 'Percival, you spend too much upon yourself, and you ought to give so much out of your income to this, that, or the other,' it would be a different thing: you are an old friend, and we all look up to you with respect, and though I might think you hit me hard, I should feel pretty sure you were not far wrong. But I can't see that, when a boy sits opposite to me, laying down the law as if nobody had ever had a notion of right and wrong before he was born, and making out that I have no right to my own property, or to be comfortable in my own house. And it has come to this, that I won't stand it, and so I told him."

"So he told me. He also said you wished him to take my curacy."

"I said, and Holmby too, it would be the best thing that could happen to him—to *him*, mind you, not to *you*."

"I am not afraid; I am accustomed to deal with young men, and have had much comfort in their help. They have their own special vocation, which no elder can fill as well."

"If they are like Cecil, their vocation is to drive their elders out of their senses. However, he may be wiser under your eye than under mine. I only hope he will not argue Mrs. Brudenell into a nervous fever."

"I may tell him, then, that you are not angry with him; and send him over to see you?"

"Not for the world. Keep him away till he is improved. He starves till he is savage, and I would rather not meet him till Mrs. Brudenell has broken him into taking his proper meals. I will see that his traps are sent over, and shall take the liberty of adding a dozen or two of port, and if she can get him to drink it, it may save him from decline. Whenever I gave him any, he ran off with it to somebody who didn't want it at all, as I could have told him, if he would have asked me;

once it was an old woman who got drunk every market-day, as regularly as possible—and another time to a young fellow who had met with an accident, and was ordered to be kept low, which he called starving him. Of course, Sally was not forthcoming for two days, and Tom Slater had an attack of inflammation—but Cecil does not believe it to this day."

"There is one thing I must tell you frankly," said Mr. Brudenell, after a pause, "my curacy is but a small one; and though we are too glad to have him as a guest for the present, he will have to put up with a lodging of anything but luxurious dimensions."

"Just what I wish, Mr. Brudenell. Let him rough it a little, and he will leave off worrying himself and everybody else about being too comfortable. He says money is only a burden, so let him try how he can do without it. He has never tried it fairly yet, while he has had my purse to fall back upon. Now I have made a resolution, and I shall keep it, to leave him quite alone for a year. I must find Holmby, if not a better curate, at least one who will not shriek controversy into his ears when he has the gout; and if that curate proves better fitted for the living than my nephew, he will probably get it. I have a conscience too, though I do not run about talking of it. I should be glad to put my brother's son into the living, if he is fit for the duty; but I must consider my people as well as my family."

"You are perfectly right," said Mr. Brudenell; and after a few more amicable arrangements, he got into his pony-chaise and drove into the village. The first acquaintance he met was an elderly woman, going home with a basket of linen. He stopped to exchange a few kind words, and took occasion to mention the young curate. She set down her basket to lift up both her hands.

"Oh, sir, the blessedest young gentleman that is that ever we had among us! He is that kind when a poor creetur is ill, he don't care how often he comes, nor how long he stays, and he'll sit and talk by the hour together, just like a print book, and such beautiful long words he

do use. Yes, he is only too good to live, he is, Mr. Brudenell, sir—and they tell me he is going away, and I declare, I feel as if I was a losing some one belonging to me. And if I only knew where he was going, I shouldn't care how far I walked to fetch his bit of washing, for I know his ways, and how he likes his things folded, and most particular he be, sir—and it took me a long time to please him quite with them stiff round collars. They kep' me awake at night, more than once, sir, did them collars: it worreted me so not to make 'em go as the dear young gentleman wished; but I managed it at last, and I'll be bound there is no lord in the land has a stiffer collar o' Sundays, though I say it."

"Mr. Percival is staying with me, Mrs. Allen, so if you like to come over, Mrs. Brudenell will let you know about the linen. He has a little overworked himself here, and a change will do him good."

"Maybe, sir, and I hope it will, but I always think he is not long for this world—we are much too wicked for such as he."

"Well, we must try and improve, then; Mrs. Allen, and keep him with us to see it." And nodding kindly, he drove on to the Rectory. The clerk was just coming through the churchyard gate, and lifted his hat to the Vicar of Stourbrooke.

"How is your wife, Giles? Mr. Percival said she had not been well."

"Much obliged to Mr. Percival, I'm sure, sir. She is middling, thank you—if she will only think so. I beg your pardon, sir, but is it true that Mr. Percival is gone to Stourbrooke?"

"He is there now, and I hope he means to remain for the present."

"He won't be here next Sunday, then, sir?"

"I imagine not."

The clerk drew a long, deep breath, as if a load were taken from his spirits. "I hope, sir," he said, slowly and emphatically, "he will be the better for the change." His looks added, "I am sure we shall," as he rubbed his hands together surreptitiously.

"I hope he will," said Mr. Brudenell, "for he is certainly thinner than he was."

"Is he, sir? Ah! I dare say he is. He is a very—very well meaning, worthy young gentleman, I am sure."

"Only he means well in a way you are not accustomed to, Giles—is that it?"

"Mr. Brudenell, sir, it is not for me to make any complaints. I never do; I know my duty, and I have done it this twenty year and more, to the best of my poor ability; and if Mr. Holmby is satisfied, it is nothing to me what anybody else may say—nothing at all."

And as might be expected from such an announcement, a very few encouraging words from his listener brought out the whole pent-up flood of his wrongs—the insults, the aggravations he had received from Mr. Percival, no one could tell; and no flesh and blood could have stood, but that of a saint or an angel, which no parish clerk was expected to be, as he had ever heard, though "what we may be coming to," he added hysterically, "there is no taking on oneself to say." Mr. Percival had openly sneered at his desk in church—had declared he had no business there at all—had told him before a dozen people that he read through his nose—had insulted his singing—had not allowed him a voice in the Christmas decorations, though for years he had always put the holly his own self round the pulpit candlesticks—had abused all the good old tunes that Mr. Holmby liked so much, and which he said, deaf as he was, he could always hear—and would only let the children sing the Old Hundredth on condition that they rattled it off like a jig. In short, things had nearly come to such a pass, that Durningham might have lost her clerk of twenty years' experience—would certainly have lost him, but for his wife, who was crazy about Mr. Percival, as all the women folk were, and got up aches and pains, he did believe, for the pleasure of sending for him to come and talk to her, and make her cry. But she'd have to get over that now, for there'd be no trapesing after him to Stourbrooke; and a good job too, begging Mr. Brudenell's pardon.

"Well, Giles," said Mr. Brudenell, when the clerk paused for breath, "I have no doubt you have been a little tried. But if, as you say, all the good women like Mr. Percival, I think that is a strong recommendation. Our wives are often wiser than we, though they do not know it."

"Don't they, sir? Ah! Well, perhaps they don't—and I hope they never may."

"There I agree with you, Giles," said Mr. Brudenell, as he turned his pony's head towards the Rectory, which stood at a short distance from the church.

Mr. Holmby was out, but his sister, a comfortable-looking maiden lady of doubtful age, met the Vicar of Stourbrooke, almost in tears. She was quite wretched about Mr. Cecil Percival—she was sure he did not eat enough to keep a sparrow alive, and if ever there was any one who earned his comforts, and deserved to have the best of everything, it was he. Young people, in these days, had such peculiar notions, and her brother did not like them, as was natural; but he was very fond of Mr. Percival, as were they all. It would be a relief to all their minds to know he was at Stourbrooke, as Mrs. Brudenell was the only person in the world who could manage him for his own good, and everybody knew how he looked up to the Vicar. So sorry that Mr. Holmby was not in—but might she venture to put a small hamper into the carriage, for the dear young man? He ought always to take arrowroot or sago with wine it, before going to bed, and after great exertion; and sometimes he seemed to fancy a little jelly—she gave him some once when he was arguing with the Rector, and to her great joy he cleared the whole dish, without seeming to know it; so perhaps he might do it again. She had got a mould ready to send over, if Mr. Brudenell did not mind—and perhaps he would be so very good as to draw him into an argument about something, over it—calves' foot jelly was so very good for a delicate frame.

"But supposing we agree on all points, Miss Holmby?"

"Oh, that would be unlucky! but perhaps you would

not mind differing a little, for once—for his good, you know, Mr. Brudenell? I assure you it is the only way to keep him alive. If ever I have been particularly anxious to make him take a bit of supper, on Sunday night, I always began upon Brady and Tate—no matter how I brought them in—and that was sure to set him off arguing, and by the time he had said all he had to say against them, poor dear souls, he had generally got through the best part of my chicken. Perhaps you would remember that, and try it now and then?"

"If all other means fail, I certainly will," said Mr. Brudenell; and as soon as the hamper was placed in the carriage, he turned Snowball's head homewards.

It was later than he intended before he reached Stourbrooke, some delay being caused by giving a lift to a tired parishioner returning from a long walk, stopping a quarrel among some boys, and holding a conversation with a farmer, known as the fiercest Radical in the neighbourhood, but marvellously softened towards the priesthood, since he had known the Vicar. As he drove into the yard, old Jane put her head out of the kitchen window, and as quickly drew it in again, and her voice was heard shrilly announcing to missis that master was come. Mrs. Brudenell soon appeared, with a smile of welcome as usual, which, had the Vicar's mind not been pre-occupied, he would have observed was rather forced.

"You are later than I expected, love. Have you settled everything?"

"Settled is a word of large meaning," said Mr. Brudenell, as he handed out the hamper to the old gardener, whose duty it was to take care of Snowball; "I have received a good deal of information, and implicated myself in sundry delicate pieces of diplomacy. Mrs. Allen is coming to hold high council with you about Percival's shirt-collars, my love; and Miss Holmby hopes you will keep him from starvation with calves'-foot jelly, administered through Brady and Tate. You do not see the connexion of the two ideas; neither did I, till she pointed it out."

"Miss Holmby is a good soul, but with no wits avail-

able beyond her cupboard door. She need not have troubled herself or you with all these little gallipots of odds and ends. Does she think we get nothing to eat in Stourbrooke? But never mind—somebody will be glad of them if Percival is not. I have a visitor waiting to see you, Julian."

The Vicar turned and looked at her more attentively. The trembling of her voice caught his ear. "Anything the matter?"

She drew him gently on without replying, till he was near the parlour door; then hid her face on his shoulder. "Julian, you were right, and I was wrong: forgive me, as I forgive him *now!*"

He lifted her face with his hand, and she saw his all one bright flush of eager hope. "Is it George? Has he brought the child?"

She turned from him in haste, opening the parlour door. The Vicar made one stride forwards, and found his hand grasped by that of Roland Clarendon.



CHAPTER VI.

HOW MR. SAVILLE KEPT HIS WORD.

HARCOURT had found Mr. Saville, after some little difficulty, not at any of the tables, as he expected, but walking up and down with M. Lepelletier, in such eager conversation, the young man was close to his elbow before his vicinity was perceived. The moment he did perceive him, however, his face lighted up, and, shaking off his companion with little ceremony, he linked his arm in Harcourt's, and turned to leave the building.

"I am so glad you are come, Clarendon; I was just wishing for you."

"I am glad I have found you, then, if I am still in time. You have not been playing?"

"Yes, I have. Come out of all this noise and glare; I want a word with you alone."

They found a dark alley under the trees, where no one

was within hearing. “Now,” said Harcourt, impatiently, “what is it you have to say?” He was pretty certain what it was already.

“Clarendon, will you lend me some money?”

“To lose at roulette? I wonder you can ask such a thing.”

“My dear boy, I wonder at myself. If any one had told me this morning that I should so lower myself before night, I should have been inclined to say, ‘Is thy servant a dog?’ Now I feel like one, yet I ask it—and implore it as an act of mercy.”

“An act of senseless cruelty, on the contrary. It would be giving you a knife to put to your own throat.”

“No, Clarendon, no; it will save me from what is worse. Listen! I will hide nothing from you. I have already disgraced myself, and broken my word to a dying saint—that in itself were enough; but I am in Lepelletier’s power; he knows passages of my miserable life that I would bury five fathom deep if I could, even if I had to lie down by their side—and I dare not openly affront him. He would have thought I did, if I refused altogether. I meant just to throw away a trifle; but you know what that leads to, and before I knew what I was about, I had lost enough to make me dread meeting Marion’s eyes, as if their innocent look were a firebrand.”

“She thought you had not much about you.”

“Poor child! let her think so! I tried, for her sake, to win it back—Lepelletier offered me the means. It went with the rest; he can do no more, and he must be paid. Clarendon, will you not help your father’s old friend, when he has no one else?”

Harcourt thrust his hands into his pockets, and set his teeth hard.

“You have no right to ask me, Mr. Saville.”

“I know it—I own it—the right I had once I lost, when the grave closed on one whom no madness of mine could quite weary out. While he lived, Harcourt, I had a chance, a rope to cling to; and since I have met you, it has almost seemed as if I had found it again. Hear me once more—stand my friend this once, and give me

an opportunity of recovering what I have lost, of replacing it for Marion's sake—it is she whom I have robbed, and who will be the sufferer. Give it me this evening, and I call Him to witness who hears and sees us both, I will never set foot in one of these places again!"

" You have broken your word—who can trust your oath?" asked Harcourt, sternly.

" Oh!" murmured the miserable man, dropping the arm to which he had clung, and covering his face with his hands, " that I should live to hear that said to me by Clarendon's son!"

There was a short silence; Harcourt, vexed and indignant as he was, began to feel his compassion struggling against his better judgment. Mr. Saville, gay and careless, was a very different object from the humiliated suppliant by his side. He could not but speak a soothing word to one so much his elder, in such distress.

" I would gladly be of use to you, Mr. Saville, but it would only add to your trouble to do what you ask. I tell you what I will do, if you like. I will let you have the money for Lepelletier, if you will come away directly you have paid him."

" You are my better angel, your father's own son!" and Mr. Saville seized the young man's hands, and kissed him, continental fashion, on both cheeks. " God will reward you—not for my sake, but for that innocent child's."

" The less you say about her the better, for I can tell you it hardens my heart more than anything. I must go and fetch this money—how much is it? Wheugh! Your friend M. Lepelletier must be a very confiding person. I should make him quietly understand this will be your last transaction of the kind."

" It will—I solemnly promise you it will—it shall."

It was some time after this that Gervase Wray came to look for Harcourt, and found him wandering about the large saloon, waiting for Mr. Saville, who had gone with the money he had provided, to find Lepelletier, and had not returned. Mr. Wray shook his head when he heard the story, and suggested a visit to the roulette-table.

" You must be very innocent, Clarendon, not to have thought of that sooner."

" Do you suppose I have not? I have been execrating my own weak folly the last half hour, but I had not courage to go and look on what I had done. Come with me, and if we find he has taken me in, I will shame him before the whole room."

" Here he comes!" said Gervase, starting.

Harcourt started too, as he perceived Mr. Saville moving slowly towards them, with uncertain, tottering steps, and a face almost grey in its deathly pallor. He held out his hands with a piteous gesture to the young men, and almost fell into their arms. It was like supporting a form of damp marble.

" I knew it—I felt it," said Harcourt; " I knew how it must end! Never mind, sir—keep up a good heart; don't think of it any more—she shall not be the loser. Let the trash go—it is well lost if it has cured you. Let us take you home."

" Yes, take me home—take me home. I shall keep my oath, Harcourt—I shall never come here again."

" So much the better; but you are ill. A mouthful of brandy, Gervase—fly. Here, sir, sit down and lean on me. It is a little faintness, and will soon pass."

" It is more than that; but it will pass, as you say. Clarendon, I paid Lepelletier, and to-morrow I must settle with you. Don't forget."

" No, sir, I am not likely to forget this evening. God forgive me for what I did! I am punished already. Here, drink this," putting to the white lips the glass Gervase brought. " Thank Heaven, he can swallow it; now we may get him home!"

By this time a crowd had gathered round them, and, to Harcourt's relief, among them was an English surgeon, whom they had met at the table d'hôte. He at once took the case into his own hands, and, by his help, Mr. Saville was assisted into a carriage, while Gervase Wray went to watch over the ladies, and prevent their being terrified by a false report.

As Harcourt, who had remained a moment behind, to

remunerate the attendants, was leaving the place, he was suddenly stopped by M. Lepelletier, to inquire after his friend. "What would you have, sir?" he returned, bitterly; "you must be accustomed to such cases by this time. He has lost once too often, that is all, and wisdom, if he has learnt it, is come rather late."

"Permit me, sir, you do not comprehend——" began the Frenchman, but Harcourt cut him short.

"Pardon me, sir, I comprehend perfectly, and I trust to your penetration to comprehend *me*."

He turned his back on Lepelletier as he spoke, and hurried on, overhearing, as he passed, voices loudly discussing, with many expressions of envy, the wonderful luck some one had just had—luck which never came to them, let them court it as they would. And he thought of Marion's sorrowful eyes, and Saville's ghastly face, and his father's love for him, and could have turned on them all in the bitterness of his heart, and cursed the foul Dagon of their idolatry. But the victims, innocent and guilty, depended on him now, and he had not a minute to lose in anger or self-reproach. To prevent Marion from seeing her step-father in his present state was his most pressing care; and thanks to Wray's precautions, the ladies did not reach the hotel till the sick man had been carried to his bed. He seemed hardly conscious, and Mr. Price shook his head in reply to Harcourt's inquiries.

"It is a bad case, very bad. Has he been suffering lately?"

"Yes; his servant told me this morning he had had a bad night, and complained of faintness; and I suppose his losses were too much for his brain."

"His losses? just feel that coat."

Clarendon took up the one just removed, and immediately thrust his hand into the pockets. They were literally crammed with notes, napoleons, and five-franc pieces. Auguste, who had been summoned in haste from his amusements, came in as Harcourt was spreading them on the table, and opened his eyes at the unusual spectacle. He knew what it meant without being told,

and glanced at the bed with an involuntary shrug of the shoulders, that told more than words. It was a look much more of envy than of commiseration, for he had been playing himself, and was still flushed with the excitement of parting with his last florin.

"That must be locked up at once," said Mr. Price, quickly. "You had better count it over first, though."

Harcourt began, but the metallic sound roused the sufferer from his lethargy ; he opened his eyes, and murmured Clarendon's name. The young man went up to him directly. "Harcourt, mind what I say—that is all Marion's—I give it into your charge—take care of it for her."

"I will, sir, if you wish it."

"I do wish it—that gentleman is my witness, that I declare it to be hers, and charge you to deliver it into her own hands. If I could have held out ten minutes longer, it might have been doubled—trebled—I am sure it would—only ten minutes longer. But I couldn't, I couldn't—Harcourt, my dear boy——"

"Yes, sir."

"Take her home with you—take her to Brudenell ; he will be kind to her—he will see what is best to be done. I have only robbed her, robbed her to the last ; but if I can——"

"Come, come," interrupted the surgeon, who had approached the other side of the bed with a glass in his hand, "you must not talk any more now ; we want you to go to sleep."

"I shall sleep soon," he replied, with a smile, "but where shall I wake ? Thank you," as he returned the glass, "that was just what I wanted. Clarendon, I must speak to you alone."

Harcourt looked at the surgeon, who shook his head. The sick man smiled again. "My good sir," he said, before Mr. Price could begin to remonstrate, "if I had more time at my disposal, I should not be so uncourteous ; but you know better than I do that I have not. A thousand pardons, but I must ask you to go."

The surgeon shrugged his shoulders, but could do no

other than comply; Auguste had already disappeared. In the passage he met Marion, who had only just arrived, and had rushed up-stairs while the others were making inquiries. She had been told Mr. Saville was ill, and that was all; the grave face of Mr. Price, as he held up a warning finger, struck her with deadly fear. "We will hope for the best—he is a little revived. Do not agitate him just now. He wished to be alone with Mr. Clarendon, and in a few minutes I shall go back, and see if you can be admitted; but you must be quite calm and quiet."

"I have been in a sick-room before," she said, trying to speak with composure; "I promise to be quiet. He likes to have me about him, I know, and I understand his ways. I am sure he will let me nurse him—he has no one left but me!"

Again Mr. Price shrugged his shoulders, thinking of what he had just heard. He knew nothing of his patient's story, but what he had witnessed told him enough. They were still waiting in breathless silence, when Roland came up; he had learned more particulars below, and had hastened to see if he could be any help to Marion. The support of his arm and of his sympathy proved of no small service, as they were kept waiting longer than Mr. Price expected, or approved; and during that interval, though Marion's lips moved now and then, as suspense increased her dread, not a word was spoken by either. All at once there came a cry from the room within, that at first paralysed the young people; the surgeon made a hasty sign to Roland, and hurried back to his patient's bedside, whither Marion, as soon as she recovered the use of her knees, would have followed, but Roland, obeying that gesture, held her back. While he was soothing and entreating her to wait, Harcourt came out, whispered a few kind words as if to a sister, and drew her into the room, the door of which was then closed.

"I do not know all that happened," continued Roland, in telling the story," but Price declared to me afterwards, he never saw any one behave better than she did.

Saville was unconscious when she went in, and Price thought would never speak again, but she would not be persuaded to leave him, and was all night long by his bedside, watching, and reading her prayer-book, keeping perfectly quiet, but with a face that cut them to the heart. At last, just at three o'clock, he again revived a little, and seemed to know her, and made a sign for her to take his hand; and Harcourt heard him say, 'If Brudenell were here——!' Something, too, he uttered about wrong, and trying to make amends; and then he gradually grew still again, and while she was leaning over him, he was gone. Harcourt called me in, and between us we got her out of the room; indeed, I had to carry her to her own, for directly she tried to walk she fainted away, quite done up, and worn out. Stella and her maid took charge of her, and Mr. Price ordered her not to be disturbed for some hours; and as soon as we could collect our ideas, Harcourt came and talked seriously to me about what must be done. He said poor Saville had committed Miss Egerton to his care till he could put her under her uncle's, and therefore he could not leave her, but that one of us must start at once to tell you everything, and get Morlands ready for visitors. Of course, our tour was at an end, we all agreed on that point; Miss Egerton must not be forsaken; and as soon as possible, they would follow together, and my aunt and Stella come to us. I hated leaving at such a time, you may suppose, but he put it so strongly, I could not help myself, and I was off by the first train to Paris without seeing her again. They told me she was asleep, and Stella promised to watch over her faithfully, so I hope she will."

"And the funeral?" asked Mrs. Brudenell.

"It must be over by this time. They do those things very quickly over there. It is an uncommonly pretty place—full of roses, and all that sort of thing, you know. I came upon it by accident in one of my early morning walks, and should have thought I was in a garden, but for those long rows of crosses everywhere. I did not know we were going to leave one of *our* party there so soon."

The Vicar had held out so far, in his anxiety for particulars, but he could bear no more just then, and rising from the seat into which he had sunk on the first intelligence, made a sign not to be followed, and walked out into his garden.

Why had that dying man wished for him at the last? What could he have asked at such a moment that Julian Brudenell could refuse?

Old scenes, old hopes, old fondness—how vividly did they return to him now! He was once more in the days of his youth, not always bright, not always happy—but always hopeful, loving, ardent, even in difficulty and trouble. He stood again as he had stood so many years ago, between Harcourt Clarendon and George Saville, in the clasp of whose hands was strength—in the ring of whose voices was inspiration—whom to doubt, or grieve, or lose, would have been harder than death. And with a start, he remembered that it was over, and that he was left, the last of the three—and where were the two he had loved? One had gone down to his grave in honour, and his name remained his children's heritage; the other—? Dead to his earliest friend as he had been for years, the actual death brought a gentler sense of loss; the gulf that his conduct had made between their hearts was filled up, and the survivor felt as if it must have been partly his fault that it had yawned so widely and so long. In his last moments, Saville had remembered him—what might he not have done had his friend's patience been greater, his prayers more fervent and untiring?

Percival had considerably retired during Roland's recital, but having gathered the leading facts, and seen the Vicar retreat into the garden, could not resist the strong desire he felt to give him advice and comfort. Eluding Mrs. Brudenell's vigilance, he slipped out and followed him to the gate opening into the churchyard, where he found his old friend leaning, with his head on his folded arms, too absorbed to hear his steps till they were close behind him.

"Is that you, Percival?" he said, rousing himself with

a start. "I beg your pardon—I forgot you would be anxious. Yes, I saw your uncle, and it is all right; but I would rather talk to you by-and-by, if you will allow me."

"I did not come to trouble you about my matters, sir, but to ask if there were anything I could not do for you this evening?"

"You are very good. No, I thank you," shaking his head mournfully. "It is too late, now."

"I never mind hours, sir; midnight is as good as day, where work is to be done."

"Yet He said 'the night cometh when no man can work.' How do we ever forget that?"

"As we forget other things, sir; by not believing them. Come, I do not like to see you so cut up; *you* can have nothing to reproach yourself with."

"I wish that were true. But these moments try one's life in a way for which we are not always prepared. Take an old man's word for it, it is very difficult so to act as to leave no room for self-reproach; I, for one, have not mastered it."

"I cannot see the difficulty, sir, to one who has sound principles, and courage to carry them out. A thing is either right or wrong, and if you know you are in the right, there is nothing more to be said or done."

"There are wrong ways of doing right, Percival. You are too young to see that yet, but you may live to feel it as I do. We know that faith can remove mountains, and yet, for lack of charity, we find a daubing of untempered mortar too strong for us."

"Charity is a much abused term, in my opinion, sir. It is no true charity to connive at, or slur over, what is wrong."

"Perhaps not; but it is no less untrue, when it makes no allowance for circumstances, for training, for the force of temptation, for constitutional habit. The man that is gone—you never knew him, but your uncle did—was far more brilliant in his gifts than I; there was nothing he could not do, but rule his own spirit—his powers were a temptation, and helped to lead him astray; and I

ought to have remembered that, and have hoped and borne with him still. He thought of me at the last, poor fellow!—if I had but been there—but God's will be done."

The young man listened respectfully, but his sympathy was mingled with pity for what he considered amiable weakness. He hinted as much in his deferential attempts at advice and consolation, attempts so gently received by his elder, that he was encouraged to go further, and by the time they had walked back to the house, he had unburdened his mind of a great many ideas and opinions, which he had intended to reserve—gratified by the Vicar's silence, and comforted for recent failure at Durningham by the prospect of vast and immediate usefulness at Stourbrooke.

To one person, at any rate, his presence was of great utility, and that was Roland Clarendon, who had met him before at his uncle's, and had an honest reverence for those gifts he was conscious of not possessing. Mrs. Brudenell had inflicted rather a severe blow on her favourite, by decidedly quashing the topic of his love for Marion.

"So long as she was in other hands, it was all very well for you to write and talk what nonsense you pleased; but now she is coming to us, it is quite a different matter, and I will have nothing more said on the subject till I have had time to know her myself, and form my own opinion. And her uncle's heart is so full of trouble just now about the whole affair, that I am sure you have too much consideration to worry him with your own concerns."

Against this fiat Roland had no appeal, but he consoled himself, as best he might, by confiding the whole to Percival, bestowing, no doubt, a great deal of tediousness on his listener—for love-tales should be told to none but those whom they concern—but receiving courteous attention, and whenever he gave an opening, a great deal of advice.

"I have no experience in these things," Percival would say, when Roland paused for want of breath, "for my

work has kept me out of them, and I am not in the least likely to be drawn aside from it by any weakness or passion for any woman whatever; I reverence the sex too much to wish to see them made idols of for half their lives, and the other half hewers of wood and drawers of water. But I can understand your state of mind, and its dangers, and so I recommend your employing yourself, from morning till night, if you can, so as to prevent your dwelling on one subject; and here are some books I recommend you to look at, especially the passages I have marked for you. We are not sent into this world to enjoy ourselves, my dear Clarendon, but to work, and to make others better."

"Work? Yes, I intend to work," Roland replied, slowly; "but making others better is not in my line. I had rather some one tried it on me."

"Then let me be that one, and come with me among my daily battles with evil and folly; and if you do not grow in mental strength, at least it shall not be for want of exercise."

And then he would speak, as he could so well, of subjects that stirred the depths of the young heart, and threw a gleam of light over its troubled waters; and Roland would go away, cheered, he hardly knew why, and feeling that he would pile Pelion upon Ossa if needs were, but win and deserve Marion he must and would.

For the present, however, he was fain to be satisfied with the work immediately before him—that of getting the apartments destined for his aunt and cousin into the luxurious order Stella's fastidious eye would require; a task in which he was glad of all the help Mrs. Brudenell had time to give. The rooms had been newly furnished, and the fittings were not quite complete, and Harcourt's orders were imperative that they should be ready by a certain day. A brother of Mr. Saville's was expected at Baden daily, and when the affairs of the deceased had been placed in his hands, their return would depend on the health of Miss Egerton, still very much prostrated by the shock. A few lines from Marion to her uncle, written in evident agitation, spoke gratefully of the kind-

ness she was receiving, especially from Harcourt, and of the comfort she anticipated in paying a visit to Stourbrooke—an expression at which Mrs. Brudenell, when her husband handed her the letter, lifted her eyebrows significantly. She had her own private doubts respecting the state in which her niece's fortune would prove to be; but she would not pain her husband by hinting that they might as well make up their minds to keep the child altogether, as she should be very much surprised if she had enough left her to find her in clothes. She quietly made everything ready for her guest, as she knew Julian would wish it to be if he knew anything about the matter; the tiny "spare room," with its white curtains, and neat appliances for comfort and occupation, being rather a contrast to that in which Roland was standing with his hands in his pockets, puzzling his handsome head how to arrange sofas and tables, so that Stella's apartment should be better than anybody else's. Everything at the Vicarage was plain, and meant for utility more than show.

"But dear me," Mrs. Brudenell said, in a moment of confidence to old Jane, "after such holes as people sleep in abroad, without a notion of English cleanliness, I should think it will seem like a palace." To which Jane, who had a vague idea that foreigners were the sort of people to whom the good missionaries were sent, for whom her master preached once a year, answered, as in duty bound, that 'deed she thought so *too*.

At last a letter announced that the party were on the eve of departure, Gervase Wray alone remaining to assist Mr. John Saville; and in due course came the following telegram :

"CLARENDON TO CLARENDON.

"Home at six—barouche with greys—brougham with chesnut—van for luggage. Ladies all well."

"Barouche with greys," commented Roland, when the curt missive was put into his hands, "that is Stella's doing; she always does carry her point, and she must have her own way this time, but I wish she may not repent it."

The greys were a purchase respecting which there had been considerable difference of opinion; Roland, whose choice they were, loudly asserting their priceless value; Harcourt doubting their ever being safe to drive. They were young, unused to harness, and with tempers that kept their driver's patience as fully on the stretch as his arms; but Roland had spent much time in training and breaking them, and could already do more with them than any one else; and Stella, to tease Harcourt, had once declared she would never come to Morlands unless they were brought to meet her. When Stella once took a fancy into her head, everybody knew it was no use to reason with it, but Roland shook his seriously over the order, and so did Bowles, the coachman. The horses had done nothing during their master's absence, and how would they stand the noise of the train? They were eating their heads off, and as wild as hawks; it was all the grooms could do to exercise them; and Bowles honestly affirmed, if he might give his advice, it would be to meet the ladies with the old pair that had gone that road so often, and were startled at nothing. But this his young master knew would not do, and the result of an anxious consultation and sundry unsatisfactory experiments was, that if driven at all that day, they must be driven by Roland himself, for they minded no one else. He galloped them round the park half the morning, as much to work off his own excitement as theirs, for his longing to see Marion Egerton again grew every hour more intense. He was in a fever till it was time to start, or sufficiently near it to allow of starting; and Mrs. Brudenell, though secretly nearly as restless as himself, was provoked to see the cavalcade at the gate to pick up the Vicar half an hour sooner than there was any occasion to disturb him.

" You will only fret these poor creatures of yours by keeping them standing," she said, patting the horse nearest to her, whose arching neck and quivering ears spoke impatience in every fibre. " Mr. Brudenell is busy, and twenty minutes are of more importance to him than they seem to be to you."

"I know, I know, Mrs. Brudenell—I have been an idler too long; but you will see, I am going to turn over—steady, my man, steady!—a new leaf."

"An old family coach, you mean, like the children in our Christmas game. I am thankful my husband is not sitting behind these animals—they will run away with you as sure as you are born."

"You do not know the muscles of my arms as well as they do, luckily. If you can hold in Percival half as well, I shall call you a clever woman."

"None of your impertinence, sir; Percival is worth a dozen such great idle boys as you. It will not be from excess of zeal that *you* will tire your friends."

"Don't be too sure; he has been putting me up to no end of useful notions, and promises me plenty of work among your people if I will only be guided by his directions."

"Let me just find you making yourself busy where you are not wanted, that is all. Our poor and sick are not to be handled like Harcourt's greys; and I can tell you, if you meddle with them unadvisedly, you will find they can pull as hard. Learn to go in harness yourself, my boy, before you begin settling the collar upon others."

There was no reply to this, for Roland's steeds began to grow restive, and he found it best to move on, leaving the Vicar to follow. The weather had been close and oppressive all day, and the clouds had gathered thickly overhead, but as yet, no other signs of a storm had appeared, and they hoped to have the travellers safely housed before it began. The train was behind its time, and distant growls of thunder had been giving warning at intervals during the half hour of waiting.

"An ominous welcome for your niece, sir," said Roland, as he stood by the Vicar's side on the platform, nearly as restless as his favourite horses.

"Do you believe in omens?" asked Mr. Brudenell, with his usual deliberation.

"Yes, and no: reason and imagination never quite agree on that point. I would rather have had a bright evening for her first arrival."

"And when would you have had the storm?"

"Any time that she was safely out of its way."

"Exactly, my boy; if we had the ruling of affairs, our friends would always have fair weather; but it would not, in that case, be the world it is."

"There is the bell. They will be up in a minute now," and nothing more was said till the train stopped. Roland saw Marion's face at the carriage window, and his hand was on hers in a moment. She did not tell him that his radiant look of welcome was the most cheering sight she had beheld since he left them.

"Are my uncle and aunt here?" was her first half-whispered question.

"Your uncle is standing just behind me—do not you see him? Mrs. Brudenell is waiting to receive you at home. Where is that guard to open this door? We have been counting the hours to your arrival, and our only resource was in getting everything ready for you."

"Quite right," interposed Harcourt, who, the instant the door was opened, had sprung out, and now dispossessed his brother of his place; "just see after the traps, there's a good fellow, or there will be some mistake. I will take care of Miss Egerton."

He handed her out as he spoke, drew her arm in his, and led her up to the Vicar, who was gazing about in every direction but the right.

"Your niece, Mr. Brudenell."

The Vicar started, stood a moment looking at them, and then took Marion's hand with a warm, but low, greeting of welcome; so low, indeed, that she rather felt than heard the words. His voice was stronger when he thanked Harcourt, though his thanks were brief and hurried.

"I have fulfilled my trust, and give it up into better hands," said Harcourt, "but you would not thank me if you knew how sorry I am it is over. Excuse me, I must attend to my guests." And he turned rather abruptly to rejoin Stella, who was watching him from a little distance.

The Vicar's eye followed him uneasily. "Not engaged,

are they?" he said, as if thinking aloud; but as he looked at Marion, she answered that she did not think it was quite settled—only likely.

"Likely? Yes—perhaps so. He has been kind to you, my dear, I hope?"

"No brother could have been kinder," was the earnest reply.

"And you think you can trust yourself to us, my dear child?"

"Trust myself? Whom could I trust, if not you, Uncle Julian?"

"Then we agree to trust each other henceforth, and go home as fast as we can, for your aunt is all impatience, and I am afraid you must be tired."

"I thought I was," said Marion; "but I am so glad to be here, I do not feel it now."

She had, in fact, been feeling ill the greater part of the journey, but the excitement of arriving having flushed her cheeks, and partly restored her energy, she thought she was quite well—if only she could get quietly away without being obliged to talk to anybody. The comfortable brougham at the door of the station looked very inviting, and she was about to enter it at her uncle's desire, when Mrs. Porchester's voice made her pause and look round. The rest of the party had gathered round the barouche, and the greys were pawing the ground with an impatience that might be charming to Stella, but was by no means agreeable to her mother.

"It doesn't signify talking, and it is little I care about myself, as you know; anything does for me, and always did; but I cannot sit behind two wild, ramping creatures that you told me yourself always ran away with everybody. You did, Stella—at least, they tried to, which is just the same. And only Roland to drive—no coachman, or anything! I would rather stay here all night—I would rather walk the whole way—I would indeed!"

"My dear mamma, as both are simply impossible, I do not see how it can be helped. Do get in at once, and say no more about it."

"I am sure it is not often I say anything—I never in-

terfere, and I never open my lips if I can avoid it, as Miss Egerton knows; you young people like to settle everything your own way, or else you are not pleased; and you have worried till you have got your own way, and your dreadful horses; but all I can say is, nothing shall induce *me* to trust myself behind them—nothing."

To do Mrs. Porchester justice, it was seldom she spoke so severely and with so much resolution; nothing but intense bodily fear could have given her sufficient courage. Stella knew, by her tone, that it was a decided affair, and shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Only say what you choose to do, then, mamma. Here is Mr. Brudenell, to whom you have not yet spoken, looking quite scandalised by all this commotion. Miss Egerton, I must trust to your generosity not to tell your uncle all the distressing little family scenes you have been so unfortunate as to witness, or I question if he will ever allow you to be with us again."

"Now, Stella, that is very unkind of you, and extremely rude, and Mr. Brudenell may well be shocked; and I am sure, if it was to do anybody any good, I would not mind if the horses were wild bulls, and that you know; but I see no good in risking one's neck for such nonsense. I appeal to Mr. Brudenell—is it right, or safe?"

Mr. Brudenell, thus appealed to, rubbed his glasses, and put them on his nose, with a serious air of consideration. These were Roland's darlings, were they not, who minded him only? They were pretty creatures, certainly. Roland was a better judge than he could pretend to be, and if he said it was all right, he had no doubt that it was.

But Mrs. Porchester doubted, nevertheless, and was so wretched, and so resolute, there was nothing for it but to give up the brougham to her and her maid, while the Vicar and his niece accepted places in the barouche. When this was arranged, and the brougham fairly off, Roland was about to mount to his post, but was stopped by his brother.

"I mean to drive myself."

"You? Nonsense. It was settled that I should do it, and they know me best."

"They must learn to know me, then. I will trust no one but myself."

"Harcourt, listen to reason: it is as much as I can do to hold them; they pull like fury, and my arms are worth a dozen of yours."

"I am inclined to doubt that. Stand out of the way, Roland; you are only wasting time. When I say a thing, I mean it—generally."

"And so do I, always. You will never be able to hold them."

"I mean to try. Now, Roland, if you say any more, I shall have to remind you that I am master, after all. Sit where you please, but not in my place."

Roland stared, as if doubting his own senses. "I do not understand such language, Harcourt."

"It is plain enough, I should think. Do not let us wrangle before the ladies; but if you wish to be of real use, see after the stowing of the luggage, or there will be some blunder, I know."

He put his brother aside as he said this, and mounted the box. Roland bit his lips and ground his teeth with suppressed passion, but made no further attempt to hinder him. He lifted his hat to the inmates of the carriage as it passed, catching a half-alarmed look of inquiry from Marion, which he had not time to satisfy. It just glanced across his mind that if there were any risk, it might be better for him to take the place by Harcourt's side, so as to be ready to give him help; but pride and anger were too strong, and while he was struggling against them, the carriage and the opportunity were gone. He turned away to the spot where the numerous boxes and trunks were being packed into the van, silencing his misgivings by indignant reflections on Harcourt's conduct. What if Mrs. Brudenell were right, after all? What if the time were really come when he should feel he was dependent, and as such would be treated—and before Marion's eyes? When had "master" ever passed Harcourt's lips before, in speaking of what was his own, and therefore his

brother's too? Could he be changing? He would know that night—that hour, indeed, if these idiots would have done blundering over the ladies' bandboxes, and start off like reasonable beings. What was the matter now? A trunk missing? Just like their stupidity. It must be telegraphed for, of course. Miss Porchester's, was it? and one she was most particular about—seemed so, by the care taken to see it was safe. Oh yes, he would give the order; and he did, but all this took up time, and when at last the van started from the station, the storm had begun in earnest. The rain was pouring in torrents as they stopped at the Vicarage. Miss Egerton's luggage had been kept apart for delivery there, and Roland's vexation was half forgotten as he jumped down to see it safely taken out, anticipating her grateful thanks, and (as he was so very wet) a good-natured invitation from Mrs. Brudenell to stay till it cleared up. Mrs. Brudenell came out of the parlour to meet him, but with no such glad welcome as he had expected. "Roland! are they not come?"

"Come? I should think so. You do not mean to say they are not here?"

"No one has been here, and I could not imagine what made you all so late."

"The train was late, but they left the station long ago, Harcourt driving the young ladies and the Vicar. I suppose he has taken them to Morlands, on account of the storm."

"It was a very bad arrangement, and I do not understand it now. I thought my husband was to have the brougham."

"So he was, but my aunt took fright at the greys, so he gave it up to her."

"And you let Harcourt drive them instead of yourself?"

"I had no choice—he told me he was master, and after that, I was not going to argue the point any more."

"And you risked their lives for the sake of your pride. No, don't speak to me, Roland—I thought better of you. Hush! Do I hear wheels? Yes, thank God! it is the

brougham. You were right ; they must have changed at Morlands."

"Thank God !" repeated Roland, hoarsely, and seizing an umbrella, he ran out to assist the inmates to alight. The door was opened as he approached, and the Vicar stepped out alone.

"Where is Miss Egerton, sir?"

"I have left her at Morlands. Give me your arm, my dear boy. Thank you. How wet you are ! You had better go back in the brougham."

"All right, sir ; never mind me. I am so relieved to see you safe. I was beginning to reproach myself for not having gone on the box."

"It might have been better if you had, for your favourites are rather beyond Harcourt. My dear," as he entered the house, speaking more deliberately than usual, "I have not brought your child, you see : it was thought better not. Yes, I know my coat is rather the worse for weather, but I can change it while you are putting on your bonnet, for I am going to take you to Morlands."

"To Morlands ? Have you left her there ?"

"Yes, I have. The fact is—just lend a hand, Roland, my boy, to get this coat off—the horses ran away with us, and at last overturned the carriage in the park ; and poor Marion was the only one who was much hurt. She was taken up insensible, but I trust it is nothing serious. No, Roland, my poor boy, you are not to take it to heart ; it was no fault of yours, as we can all bear witness ; and as Harcourt did, as soon as he could speak."



CHAPTER VII.

CLAUDE MELNOTTE.

"**S**HE is coming to herself, Mrs. Brudenell ; she will be better soon."

There had been sufficient difficulty in restoring consciousness to give Miss Porchester a great deal of alarm ;

and if ever she felt thankful in her life, it was when she saw the large eyes slowly open at length, even though they soon closed again. Mrs. Brudenell entered just as this happened, and in a minute had laid aside bonnet and shawl, and was by the patient's side, administering the cordial that was standing ready. An attempt to feel Marion's pulse soon showed where the injury was, for the poor girl shrank from her touch, and on examination, her left arm was found to be severely bruised and much swollen. With the exception of the footman, who had sprained his knee in getting down while the carriage was in motion, she was the only sufferer by the accident, beyond some slight contusions. It was not the time to ask particulars, and Mrs. Brudenell had already heard the general facts. The horses had gone very fairly till the storm broke over their heads; and then they showed such wild terror, that Harcourt decided on taking them straight to their own stables, instead of turning into the village. When within sight of the lodge, an unusually vivid flash and loud report so maddened the excited creatures, that they burst into a furious gallop, and though he contrived to clear the gate, and kept them straight for some way through the park, at last dashed out of the drive upon the turf, and one of the wheels coming in contact with the trunk of a felled tree, the carriage was overturned. A vagrant, who had been crouching there to escape the rain, helped to hold the horses till the traces could be undone, otherwise there might have been still greater danger from their struggles. As it was, the Vicar, sitting opposite Miss Porchester, was able to shield her with his long arms, Marion being at the same moment thrown out against the tree. The rain was falling fast, and the only thing to be done was to get as quickly as possible into the Hall; Harcourt carried Miss Egerton in his arms, and as soon as she was under shelter, had his horse saddled, and galloped off for the Durningham doctor. Mrs. Porchester had been far too much agitated to be of the least use, and Stella, though she would not leave the sufferer for a moment, had had very little notion what she ought to do. It was, therefore, so

great a relief when Mrs. Brudenell arrived to take the responsibility off her hands, that she did not resent being overlooked, and comparatively forgotten ; and her real concern and anxiety for her companion went far towards removing a certain amount of prejudice that keen observer had cherished against her. There was quite enough to make them both anxious and self-forgetful : for Marion, though she looked at them from time to time, seemed to have no power to speak, and the state of her pulse alarmed Mrs. Brudenell. The truth was, she was ill when she left Baden, and the fatigue of the journey, and the excitement of the arrival, had been but a bad preparation for the shock she had just received. As to moving her to the Vicarage, her aunt saw at once it was out of the question, without waiting for Dr. Wartop's opinion. The latter arrived even sooner than he was expected, Harcourt having caught him just as he was setting off in quite an opposite direction, and brought him back in defiance of remonstrance. He was well known to everybody in Stourbrooke, and considered as perfect an oracle as doctors usually are where they have no rival ; and like some other great authorities was uncertain in his temper, if that may be called uncertainty which, under given circumstances, could be foretold to a nicety. To have his routine of visits broken up, was one of the things that ruffled him infallibly ; and nothing exasperated him more than accidents or illnesses brought on by what he considered want of common sense. That such a want was advantageous to the medical profession, mattered not at all ; he felt the insult to his skill of being obliged, as he said, to patch up the mischief caused by the heedlessness of fools, as keenly as if he paid the fee instead of receiving it. Consequently, he was in no humour to spare the master of Morlands, or anybody else, who might have prevented the disaster which had called him there at so inconvenient a moment.

“ Doing well ? ” was his reply to the anxious inquiries pressed upon him as he entered the drawing-room after his visit to his patient—with whom, be it observed, he had been as gentle as if she had been a daughter of his

own—"I wonder what you expect a young lady to do, when she has narrowly escaped breaking her neck? Yes, I hope she will do well in time, if those about her use their common sense, or have any to use, which seems doubtful; but I won't have her moved, mind that—and she must be kept perfectly quiet, and my orders strictly attended to, do you hear?—and I won't have her left at night"—he went on, as if uncle and aunt, friend and host, were all waiting for his departure to start on excursions of pleasure, and leave Marion to her fate—"I won't have her left, not for a moment. She will want careful nursing, and constant attention, if she is to be as well as I shall try to make her."

"I am sure, Doctor, she will have every attention here," began Mrs. Porchester. "I would nurse her myself, but I am so nervous, and so easily upset—"

"Nothing easier than to be upset, ma'am, when one of your nephews breaks in your horses and the other drives 'em. Life and limb are of no value to young men—I suppose because they so seldom use them to any good purpose—but ladies are apt to find their loss inconvenient. I could have told you exactly what would occur, if I had seen you start; not that it would have been of the slightest use. If people cannot use their common sense without advice, they seldom do so with it, so there is an end of that. One of your men hurt too?" turning to Roland, who had stood, unusually submissive, during these objurgations; "of course, where gentlemen do not mind smashing their visitors, they are not likely to be particular about their servants. It is nothing to them if a man is disabled for life; why should it be?"

The footman's case was not so bad as that, and the Doctor was exchanging a few parting words with Harcourt at the hall door, where his carriage was waiting, when a figure, hardly visible in the increasing darkness till he was close upon them, came limping to the foot of the steps. It was not often that such an object showed itself on that side of the mansion, for his rags were soaked with rain, and steeped in dirt; but directly Har-

court saw him, he called out, "All right, my man! I'll speak to you in a minute. What makes you hobble like that? Are you hurt?"

"A kick, sir. It won't be much, I dare say."

"A kick from one of those mad brutes may be more than you think. Doctor, I am sorry to be troublesome, but you must be good enough to look at this patient too. He happened (we will not inquire how or why) to be at hand when we upset, and came manfully to help, so deserves to be paid in return. Where do you live, my man?"

"Where I can, sir."

"Where do you sleep at night?"

"In a barn, under a hedge—just as it happens, sir. My suite of apartments is more spacious than yours."

"I think I know *that* voice," observed the Doctor, who had been eyeing the vagrant through his glasses; "did I not attend you last winter, at Mr. Cecil Percival's request, when you had nearly killed yourself with drinking, you fine speech-maker?"

"You did, sir; I am much obliged to you for remembering me."

"And if I remember further, you promised him and me to give up spirits, and live a decent life in future."

"It was not my fault that I did, sir; what could a poor fellow do but promise, when two such gentlemen set to talking at him at once?"

"You are not classing me with young Mr. Percival, I hope?"

"Well, no, sir, I beg his pardon, I ain't. You may go a good way before you'll find a young gentleman to run in harness with him. But he is terribly strict with a poor fellow—terribly."

"Never mind what other people may have said or done," said Clarendon, "I will give you a chance now. Go round to the stables, and I shall give orders you are taken care of. The best day's work you ever did was to serve Harcourt Clarendon, and that you will find."

"Thank you, sir; it is not much of a compliment, for they have not been many."

He touched his battered hat and shuffled away as desired.

"There is impudence for you," quoth the Doctor. "That fellow is never at a loss for an answer. Take my advice, Clarendon—give him some old clothes, and a good supper, and a trifle in his pocket, and pack him off. You'll make nothing decent out of him, I'll answer for that."

"I mean to try," said Harcourt, and calling a servant, he gave him strict orders about the entertainment of the stranger. "He wants everything—soap and water, dry clothes, food and lodging. A horse-rug and some clean straw in the empty barn will be a luxury to him, and with the prospect of a good breakfast in the morning, he is not likely to give us the slip. Mind now, he is here by my invitation, and has done me service, so he is to be treated well. Dr. Wartop will see him in the servants' hall. You will be here early to-morrow, Doctor, of course?"

"Unless I am sent for, just as I am starting, to remedy somebody's folly, which occasionally happens. There goes your gong. What an hour for reasonable beings to be sitting down to their heaviest meal!"

The dinner had indeed been so unconscionably delayed by all that had happened, that poor Mrs. Porchester, who liked her meals to a minute, was nearly in a state of rebellion, provoked beyond measure by the indifference of her daughter.

"If nobody is to have a meal or a moment's peace and comfort because Marion Egerton has had a fall, tell me so at once, and I shall know what to expect. I shall be very ill, of course, and most likely, seriously, but nobody will mind that, and I do not expect they should; it does not matter what becomes of old people so long as the young ones have their own way; but I must say it is not what I am used to at all, and so I do not hesitate to say so. It is all very well for you who are young and strong, at least strong enough for anything you choose to do, to say ten o'clock is as good an hour as seven to dine—you might as well say seven is as good an hour as ten to

go to bed, and I suppose it will end in that with me, for I am ready to drop."

"Fortunately, however, this desperate resource was not necessary, and the party sat down at last, to a board which Harcourt's well-trained cook contrived to cover as luxuriously as if his master were punctual. Anybody could send up a good dinner to the minute, was that master's remark on one occasion, but a cook deserving the name should do it at any minute; and his *chef* had taken the hint as it was intended. Mrs. Brudenell would not leave her niece, by whom she meant to watch that night; but the Vicar, though he had dined at one, remained to bless the meat, and go through the form of dining again, with very little appetite, in order to secure his host afterwards for the conversation for which he was longing.

There was much for them to talk over, more than they could attempt to do till they were quite alone; so Harcourt ordered coffee in his study, and took the Vicar in there when the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room. Mrs. Porchester having fallen asleep on the sofa, Roland and Stella were left to cheer each other under the depressing circumstances of this much-talked-of visit. Whatever it was that she said to him, during their long conference, it was certainly of a more exhilarating tendency, judging by the brightened expression of his face, than that between the elders below; for the Vicar looked very grave and thoughtful when he rejoined the ladies; and as soon as he had heard from his wife the last report of Marion, took his leave. Roland insisted on walking with him, at any rate as far as the lodge, and, during the walk, presumed so far on his companion's indulgence as to transgress Mrs. Brudenell's injunctions, and pour out a great deal about his devoted attachment and the amiable qualities of its object, to which, if the Vicar paid attention, he returned no answer whatever. It was only when they had shaken hands, at parting, that he unexpectedly turned upon his young friend with the question:

"Roland, do you remember a conversation we had before you went abroad?"

"To be sure I do, sir. Why do you ask?"

"Because you talk as if you had forgotten it. Good night." And Mr. Brudenell walked away before Roland had time to stop him.

It is not quite certain that he would have ventured to do so, for the rebuke stung, as perhaps it was meant to do, and he was not inclined to expose himself to another. He turned slowly back, and instead of going to the drawing-room, betook him to the stables. He was not, by taste or habit, a great smoker, but whenever he had anything on his mind, he confessed he found vast consolation, and a store of undreamed-of wisdom, in the influence of a cigar; and in his present mood felt unusual need of that friendly oracle. He would have one weed before he went in, and take a look at the greys the while;—oh, ah, and there was that rough, too, that Noll had picked up, he would have a look at him as well. Noll was too easy with those chaps; they might find the whole place on fire by morning, for all he knew.

"Where have you put that tramp, Bowles?" he asked the coachman, as he crossed the stable-yard.

"I have not attended to him myself, sir," said Bowles, in a tone of slightly aggrieved dignity; "he were not given into *my* charge; but he has been took care of, sir, that I can testify, and as good a supper as you'd wish to eat has been took to him in the barn, for I see it myself. My boy Sam is just gone there now with a quart of ale. He's treated downright handsome, that's what he is, Mr. Roland."

"I hope he will treat us as handsomely," said Roland; and after a careful inspection of the horses, with much conference touching their future treatment, he lounged on till he came to the barn, standing a minute at the entrance to observe its inmate at his leisure.

He was a slender, well-made man, dark in complexion, and with a head of hair cropped suspiciously short; a partial ablution and a change of clothes had improved his outward appearance, and he was reclining at his ease on the horse-cloth and straw laid down for his accommodation, the jug of ale at his lips, and Sam Bowles, and

the small scullery-maid, who had waited upon him, standing by grinning intense applause of the observations he was making by way of toast. It was rather startling to all three when they suddenly became aware of the tall figure of the "young master;" and Sam and Kezzy, by a simultaneous impulse, vanished into the darkness among wheel-barrows and implements of husbandry, till an opportunity should offer of darting out unobserved. The man put down the jug, and made an effort to rise.

"There, keep still," said Roland, as he advanced nearer; "I do not want to disturb you. How is your leg? I heard you had a kick."

"I did, sir, but it is not much; and the Doctor has patched it up. It is not the first I have had, by many. When once you are down, you know, sir, every hoof is at your service."

"Have they taken care of you?"

"Excellent care, I am much obliged to you, sir. I was never kicked into such good quarters before."

His language was so much above his position, Roland began to wonder where he could have seen him before.

"Ought I to know you, my man?" he said, presently.

"It is not for me to say so, sir."

"Were you ever at Durningham school as a boy?"

"Well, sir, they have that to boast of, but I am not aware that any tablet has been put up to commemorate the fact."

"I thought I had seen you before. Your name is Trail—Bob Trail, if I remember rightly."

"I was known by that name, sir, formerly; I have sometimes slightly paraphrased it since, into the more attractive one of Trelawny. The rose, by either name, will smell as sweet."

"Humph!" said Roland, "the less said of that, the better. Trail or Trelawny, it was you I licked once for torturing a rabbit you had snared. I would have let you off for poaching, but not for teasing a thing to death. Do you remember that?"

"You gave me very strong reasons for remembering it, sir. If all my little errors and weaknesses had been

handled in the same way, I might have been now a sadder and a wiser man, as the poet says."

"Oh ! you read the poets, do you ?"

"I have tasted that thrilling cup, sir, among others. Better would it have been for me, perhaps, if I had been content with a peasant's knowledge, which, as far as I ever saw, just amounts to spelling over the newspapers. It was Claude Melnotte was the ruin of me, sir."

"Claude *who?*"

"Melnotte, sir. You may not have heard of him, perhaps, nor seen him either. He was a peasant born, you know, sir, and a genius, and a poet, and an artist, and a gentleman every inch of him that wasn't a gardener. And he had only to go into the army without a sixpence, to come home in two years a colonel, with a pocket-book stuffed with bank-notes, to pitch across the table at Pauline's father—'There is the sum twice told !' How I used to enjoy doing that, as if I had a dozen more locked up at home!"

"What ? You have been on the stage, have you ?"

"Yes, sir ; and I will undertake to bet any gentleman the value of one of his own cigars, that on that stage there was no one could touch me in Claude Melnotte, for there was not one among the common herd who felt it as I did. I dreamed over the part till I made it my own."

"But pray, Mr. Trail, if you were in a profession you liked so much, why did you leave it ?"

"Rivals, sir, envy, the bad taste of the age, and the bankruptcy of the creature that called himself a manager, compelled me to retire ; and though after that I tried several other genteel callings, I never met with the success I deserved ; and came back at last to my old parish, as a wounded bird to its nest, if I may use the term, without offence to the Board of Guardians."

"With a great fancy for other birds, perhaps ?"

"Sir, the immortal William himself was a victim of the game-laws, and we know the revenge he took. Not that I have any literary designs against Mr. Percival ; my regard for his nephew would dry the caustic in' my pen, if I attempted it."

" You know Mr. Cecil Percival, do you? I will ask him about you to-morrow."

" Do, sir: and he will tell you, if he chronicles faithfully, that I am a man more sinned against than sinning."

" Humph! I doubt that. It strikes me that the thrilling cup you spoke of just now, was not the one you troubled most. When I remember you as a lad, you were strong and sturdy, and took a good deal of persuading before you would own you were thrashed: now I could knock you over with my finger. Pity, a fellow with brains like you, come of decent folks, should turn up, before he is thirty such an object as you came to this door."

" So it is, sir; but you see (*your health, sir!*), if I had always a tap like this to run to, without having to pawn my coat, I might be as decent as other people. Your ale, sir, is no poor creature: it is drink for the gods. Ah, sir, if anybody would but give me a chance, I might be a gentleman yet. I did think of enlisting once, but I could not see my way clear to being a rich colonel in two years, like Claude Melnotte, though, as the sergeant observed, no one could say I shouldn't."

" And what do you suppose you are fit for now?"

" If you put it to my conscience, sir, I should say, the thing I was exactly fit for at this moment, was a pipe."

" You are an impudent rascal, that is what you are. There is a cigar for you."

" I thank you, sir, most sincerely." He opened the stable lantern, which had been brought by Sam, and lighted it with the greatest composure. "Decidedly, sir," after the first puff or two "your tobacco is only to be equalled by your malt. And now, if I may do so without offence, I would ask your leave to make myself comfortable."

Without further ceremony, he rolled himself up in the horse-cloth, and lay on his back, with the cigar in his mouth, gazing up at the rafters, as if he were rehearsing the part of a club dandy on the stage.

" I felt regularly dismissed," was Round's comment,

when he related the scene to his brother, “ and had nothing for it but to back out of the presence. I never saw such a compound of conceit and impudence. It was all I could do not to kick him out of the barn. He will not keep those clothes of yours a week ; they will all be gone for gin by Sunday.”

“ That remains to be seen. When a man has done me a service, it will be his own fault if he does not try to do me another. We’ll have your friend Percival to breakfast to-morrow, and ask his advice. Whether we follow it or not, will depend on circumstances. We have had a near shave, my boy—frightfully near—and if one could do something to show—there, mind my hand : those pets of yours cut me to the bone, out of spite for my bullying you.”

“ You never did,” cried Roland, forgetting all his mortification in a moment. “ If I had not been out of temper, I should have sat by you, and helped you to hold them in. It was half my fault, and if only it had not fallen on her—you think she’ll be all right soon, don’t you ?”

“ If you do not wake her now by rushing up-stairs. Yes, I have just seen Mrs. Brudenell, and she is satisfied all is going on well. We will not begin on that subject now. Good-night, my boy !”

His face was smiling as he closed his bedroom door on his brother, but the smile was gone before his hand left the lock.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW DR. WARTOP WAS OBEYED.

MR. PERCIVAL demurred on receiving the invitation to breakfast, brought by Roland, with a note to the Vicar from his wife, into the vestry after the early service, which, since their friendship had grown warm, he had been persuaded to attend pretty regularly.

“ Your brother is very good, but I have very little

time for visiting, and my breakfast is an affair of about ten minutes. I do not hold with the necessity, or the expediency, of people wasting the best part of the morning, indulging in luxuries that would feed their poor neighbours for a week."

"I say, we won't go into the political economy question just now; we want your advice, and about a poor neighbour, too, a waif from your own parish, and such a specimen as you may well be proud of—a fellow without a rag that a scarecrow would thank you for, quoting Shakespeare, and setting up for a Claude Melnotte. Harcourt is bent on making something of him, and if you do not start us, we are safe to go off the course."

"If you want my advice, that is another thing," replied Percival. "I remember the man you mention," he said, as they walked across the park, "if his name is Trail. He is a curious specimen of the kind of training our lads get from national schools and mechanics' institutes and penny literature, without Church guidance and discipline. He has picked up scraps enough to delude himself with the idea that he is a scholar, and has aped the gentleman as a stroller, till he thinks he is one in reality. Drink has been his bane, and but for that, I had hopes of him. He promised fairly when he was ill; and had the machinery of our parochial system been in better order, and I could have kept him employed under my own eye, he might have taken a start then; but I was hampered, as usual, and when he got well, I lost sight of him. We must not lose him again. Shall I go and have a talk with him at once?"

"No; you must have breakfast first, and be introduced to my aunt and cousin. With such an eye for the beautiful as you have, you cannot but be charmed with a sight of Stella, if only by good luck she may have taken it into her head to come down in time."

"The habit of late breakfasts is a very bad one," pronounced the curate, as they entered the grounds. "I have no faith in any resolution that fails to wake you in the morning. Yield to self-indulgence then, and it is your master for the rest of the day."

"Dear me," said a voice at a little distance, "that is a very alarming doctrine to me for one." And Stella, in a most becoming morning costume, came forward to meet them with a smile. "How do you do, Mr. Percival? It is so long since we met, I shall not be in the least offended if you do not remember me. Roland, I am quite ashamed of you, that you have left me to gather my own bouquet, but to show my generosity, there is a flower for your button-hole. You might have been polite enough to ask if I should like to go to church too."

She led the way into the breakfast-room, and rang for the urn with so completely the air of the gracious hostess, that it was difficult to look upon her as anything else. Roland made some observation of the kind; in return for which she shook a large spray of fern in his face, and told him he was a saucy boy, and if that was all the good his early church-going did him, she was sorry; smiling gay defiance at Mr. Pereival the while, whose grave abstraction piqued her a little.

She was looking remarkably well, untired, unshaken, by journey or accident, her toilette perfect, her spirits elated by the satisfaction with which she regarded everything in and about Morlands, where she had not been a visitor for some time. The last alterations and improvements were entirely to her taste; and the conviction that she was born to be mistress of all she surveyed had stamped itself so vividly on her mind when she woke, that she was impatient to rise, and enjoy it to the utmost. It had been a slight check to her complacency overnight, that Harcourt should have been so full of Marion Egerton and her affairs; but as this was accounted for by circumstances, it gave her no real uneasiness. Certainly, there was no fault to be found with his morning greeting, when he came in, or his manner of conducting her to the head of the table, where she presided with equal grace and good humour. Mrs. Porchester was not yet come down, and Mrs. Brudenell did not appear for some time, having waited to make her patient comfortable.

"Thank you," she said, briskly, as inquiries were

made, "she is doing as well as we could expect ; she had some sleep in the night, and I think there is less fever. Nice business it has been altogether, I must say. Tea, if you please, my dear, and strong enough to keep me awake till dinner, if convenient ; for at my time of life a night's rest is a consideration. We cannot all shake off our fatigues, and look as blooming after them as you do."

Harcourt's smile from the bottom of the table brought a slight glow into his cousin's face ; but whether he were going to confirm the compliment in words, she was prevented ascertaining by her mother's entrance, rather in a piteous state of self-condolence.

"How do you do, Mrs. Brudenell? How is the poor dear girl this morning? Thank you, I have had no sleep—not a wink—for thinking of my fright. Did you ever hear of such a wonderful escape?"

"Well, it might have been worse, certainly ; and, as you say, or perhaps meant to say, we may be very thankful it was not. If Harcourt had not kept his presence of mind——"

"Harcourt? If I had not kept mine, you mean. It is for my own firmness I have to be thankful, Mrs. Brudenell, and not for Harcourt's. They were all trying to convince me that it was quite safe, and that I knew nothing about it (they always do ; I am never supposed to have an opinion of my own on any subject whatever) ; but I was firm ; I can be when I see it is necessary, and I am thankful I was, very thankful, for you see what happened."

"Yes, that my husband and niece were in danger, instead of yourself. Well, it is natural you should be glad, and gratitude is always a good thing, even in the wrong place. You had a successful tour on the whole, I hope."

"Oh dear yes, charming ; was it not, Stella? most charming, only one gets so tired of moving about, and Jones grows so dissatisfied, I am always obliged to be making her presents of gowns and caps to prevent her giving warning, and for all that, I could hardly ever get

her for five minutes at a time. You may shake your head, Stella, but it is quite true ; you know you do require so much waiting upon ; and then there is all the packing besides. Oh yes ; Switzerland is beautiful, of course, and no one would think of saying otherwise. It must be, you know, as one goes so far to see it, and if one could only be still, I should enjoy travelling exceedingly, quite as much as staying at home ; but railroads make me sleepy and stupid, and steamboats turn me giddy, and as for going up mountains in a thing that looks like a hospital stretcher, at the mercy of a parcel of men who don't understand a word that is said to them, I did set my face against that, and there was an end of it. I never could make out, from those who went, that there was any pleasure in it ; for directly they got to the top, they had to come down again, so what was the sense of going at all ? It is very well for you to laugh, Roland ; but I do believe, sooner than not make themselves conspicuous, young men would walk up the side of a house ! ”

“ Never mind Roland, Mrs. Porchester : we all know that nature has been prodigal to him in the length of his legs, to make up the deficiencies of his intellectual organs. Sensible people, like you and me, know the value of our bones : and I should have been entirely of your opinion, for I hate anything like a precipice, as much as I do a steamer. I think it was very good of you to go with the young people at all.”

“ Oh, but really, it was all very delightful—very much so, indeed. Sweet place, Baden-Baden is, and very much we enjoyed it ; at least, we should have enjoyed it very much, if it had not been for that sad business. Poor dear Mr. Saville—such a charming person as he was, and so very gentlemanly in all his arrangements—how he managed I am sure I can't tell, for all the world knows he had run through everything of his own, and he never seemed to consider expense. I do believe it was an immense comfort to him to meet with us, and that will always be a happiness to think of, even if one made a sacrifice at the time, which one should always be ready to do, and,

as Stella said, it quite destroyed all the pleasure of the trip. You did say so, Stella, and very natural that you should ; it would have been quite unfeeling if we had all been in uproarious spirits in such distressing circumstances. I can assure you, Mrs. Brudenell, we all lost our hearts to your niece, and Stella in particular, and it is a great compliment to say so, for Stella hardly ever cares for girls at all."

"We are the more beholden to her," said Mrs. Brudenell, smiling good humouredly at Miss Porchester, whose expressive shrug was sufficient comment on her mother's remarks. "I hope poor Marion will soon be in a condition to appreciate her kindness. I am afraid she must have been a great trouble to you all."

"Oh no, not at all. Dear little thing, it was quite a pleasure to have her with us—quite a gleam of sunshine, so to speak, only she was too poorly and miserable to open her lips the greater part of the way home. Of course it is a serious thing to have the care of young women, and so you will find, for they always will have their own way, or you are allowed no peace."

"Ah, there are methods of dealing with them, and with young men too, as Roland there can bear witness, if you set about it in the right way ; but it will be some time before this poor child will be able to do more than take everything very quietly."

"Certainly, and it seems to me, young people always do take things quietly, at least, anything that they don't particularly care to do ; if they want to go anywhere, that is quite another matter, or if they expect anything to be done, and it is not ready to a minute. I am sure, the piece of work there was about those dreadful horses, because Stella would persist——"

"I cry you mercy, mamma ; you have held me up to public condemnation all breakfast-time, and here is Mr. Percival so shocked he hardly knows which way to look. Those horses are a forbidden topic, and will be—until I find some charioteer who will take me behind them again."

"That will not be here," said Harcourt.

"So you say, now ; but we shall see."

"See you may, but not drive those horses."

"I wonder what bet you would take that Roland and I do not try them within the week?"

"None whatever ; it would be unfair to bet on an impossibility."

"You dare us, then ?" said she, rising, with a gay gesture of wilfulness ; "it is your own fault, recollect, if, by contradiction, you make a sweet-tempered woman obstinate. When you have finished breakfast, my brave Roland, I want you in the garden."

And she stepped out upon the terrace, giving a backward glance at the party she left, as a parting shaft from her quiver. Roland was by her side directly. "You will have a sun-stroke if you do not mind."

"No, the sun knows me by this time ; I never breathe so freely as in his beams. Look here, my Paladin ; I expect you to stand by me in this passage of arms with Harcourt, for I am not going to be beaten by him, or his horses either, and I cannot very well take the reins myself, in the presence of Bowles and all the stable-yard."

"I should rather think not ; you would be glad to let go pretty soon if you did. But really, Stella, the old boy does not like it, and if he begins to pull in earnest, I can tell you he is harder to hold than my poor greys."

"The greater the necessity for his being immediately broken in. What carriage could we have?"

"There is the van—you won't like that. We shall get one over for you from Boyce's, while he mends the other."

"I do not care what the vehicle is, if it will carry me and my point. Now, be good, and I will reward you. Find me a rose, not too much blown, and I will take it up to Marion Egerton, when her aunt is out of the way, and tell her it is from you."

"You are the kindest and best of creatures," he cried, gratefully ; "no sister could be kinder. I only wish——"

"Why do you stop? A wish is nothing if not expressed."

"I stopped for fear of giving offence, for in speaking of you as a sister, I was going to say, I wished you were."

"Why should that give me offence? I feel rather disposed to consider it a compliment."

"It is the highest I can pay; and I do not think I should have paid it a few months ago."

"You are honest, I must say, and I have a right to ask why your opinion has changed?"

"Because I think now you two would be happy together, and I love so dearly myself, I wish to see the old boy in love too."

"Meaning that he is not so yet, of course. I quite agree with you there, if I cannot exactly follow your wish. He cares more for himself than for any one else, does our excellent host, and quite right too. By the way, your clerical friend is not very sociable. I wasted more civility upon him this morning than I ever did in my life. Is he shy, or stupid, or poetical, or all three?"

"Neither; he is rather too much of an ascetic, that is all, and grudges himself everything like pleasure. If he paid you no attention, it is only the way he arms himself against you ladies; rather prides himself on it, I fancy, for I have heard him say the young clergy ought to be too absorbed in their work for love or marriage."

"Indeed!" said Stella, drily.

They walked in silence a little while after this, until, on passing the library window, she stopped with a smile, and made her companion listen to the conversation going on within. Harcourt had taken his guest there, and they had evidently fallen upon some knotty point of difference, for they were flinging replies as thick as hail.

"I tell you what, Percival, you must come back and dine with us, and we will go into the subject thoroughly, which we have not time for now. Here are my authorities, close at hand, and stubborn printed facts are tiresome things to encounter, when you have only shadows to bring against them."

"Shadows? The very bone and marrow of a strength that can remove mountains lie in what you term shadows. There is more light in their shade than in the full blaze of your self-kindled farthing rushlights."

"I never heard of a farthing rushlight that kindled of

itself. It might be convenient where lucifer-matches are scarce, and St. Finian's finger ends not forthcoming, in whose phosphorescent qualities you of course implicitly believe."

"I believe there is a great deal of fossilised truth in such legends, and therefore do not scoff at them."

"So do I believe that there is very good eating on a walnut-tree, but I prefer cracking the shells before I swallow the fruit."

"You would destroy the shell before the fruit is ripe, and flatter yourself it would ripen the quicker."

"Not at all. I would destroy nothing that is useful—only when it has served its turn, and is done with, as I submit is the case with the shell of a peeled walnut."

"Like your old labourers, whom you hand over to the Union when they are past work."

"I pay pretty highly for their keep there, so it would be hard if I might not reap some of the advantage."

"Yes! whatever you can pay for, you think you may do. It never occurs to you what an engine money is to those who know how to use it. If I had but your opportunities and power——!"

"You would find them much more troublesome than chanting and sermon writing. What would you do here were you caliph for a day? Open a general asylum for everybody, like the man in Mrs. Browning's poetical novel—or a La Garaye hospital of domestic medicine—or a retreat for the mental solace of all those unfortunate persons who cannot live upon terms with their neighbours or themselves?"

"You might do worse than either of those."

"Of course you might, and no doubt you would; it was only my delicate way of putting it. It would come much to the same in the end."

"There I differ from you entirely. It does not come to the same whether property be devoted to selfish purposes, or to the good of others."

"What do you include among the selfish purposes? Living in your own house, riding your own horses, keeping garden and park in good order, receiving one's friends, and so forth?"

"Yes, so far as it is done for your own gratification."

"That saving clause is a great comfort, for I often find it an immense deal of trouble. But how about the great question of the employment of the working classes? Who will give my servants and gardeners and helpers an equivalent for the incomes they draw out of me, if I turn Morlands into an asylum—for idiots, we will say—nothing personal being intended?"

"I must put a stop to this," said Stella, "or they will be at daggers drawn in another minute. Pray, cousin Harcourt," as she looked in at the window, "was that last sarcasm aimed at your visitors?"

"Upon my word," said Harcourt, advancing to throw up the window, "it is rather hard that one may never have a minute to oneself for improving conversation. Is there anything you want, my dear lady, that your servant can get or do for you?"

"Yes, a great deal. I want to see your far-famed stables, and to thank that poor man who helped to hold the horses yesterday. I suppose we may consider his case one in which differing opinions must agree."

"Perhaps not; but come and see him, by all means, if you like. I very much doubt if he is ready to see *you*. I asked after him at nine o'clock this morning, and was told he was still fast asleep."

"A cool hand," said Roland, "and in my opinion a lazy one. The greatest kindness you could do him would be to give him a good stiff job, and take care he did it. I would not trust him farther than I could see him, nor, indeed, half so far."

The visit to the stables was rather a lengthened one. Percival was fond of horses, and in the pleasure of handling and criticising them, forgot everything else; and Stella amused herself by feeding them all round, except the young greys, whom she was not allowed to approach. While the brothers and their adherents were holding serious conclave about these last, she found herself standing apart with the curate, and a few trivial remarks led to more conversation than had been attained at breakfast. Miss Porchester spoke of a visit she had paid his uncle

just after her first entrance into society, and Cecil being drawn on to talk of his ancestral home and parish, soon found himself dwelling on the topics next to his heart, the hopes with which he had begun, the disappointments with which he had closed his pastoral career at Durningham,—charmed by the softened interest expressed by word and look, and yielding unawares to a fascination in which he had never believed. He was quite sorry when the others came back to them, looking as if they had had a difference of opinion, as Roland was flushed, and Harcourt's brow was knit, while coachman and groom wore the perplexed aspect of politicians who do not see clearly with whom it would be safest to side. Roland had been, practically, so completely master in that department, it put all reasonable calculation into confusion when the real authority began to interfere.

"What is it, Roland?" said Stella, touching his arm; "you look as unamiable as it is possible for you to look—and that is paying you no small compliment."

"A very doubtful one. No wonder what I look, when he talks of selling the greys."

"He may talk," said she, smiling, "but we shall see. He always declared I should not have them to meet me, but they came."

"Yes, and we see the consequences."

"Come, you need not be sulky about that adventure, when it has brought Marion to be your guest for an indefinite period. I fully expected your gratitude would be overpowering."

"I cannot be grateful that she is ill, and in pain."

"Then be thankful she is no worse. Depend upon it, we have not seen the end of that adventure yet. Where is your waif that you were going to show me?"

"Here he comes, lazy hound, looking only half awake. I never saw a fellow I had a stronger desire to kick."

Trail's manner was different this morning from what it had been overnight. He made a Claude Melnotte salutation to the whole party, and stood waiting to be questioned, with the dignity which he was fond of ascribing to "Nature's gentlemen." Harcourt asked if he had

been taken care of. Yes, he thanked him ; he had received every attention he could desire ; he hoped he might take the liberty of asking if the young lady was better—his own hurt had not kept him awake, and would not hinder him long, he hoped, from working. At that word, Percival nodded approvingly ; Harcourt eyed the speaker from head to foot, and asked him what he could do.

“ I have done many things, sir, in my time, which it would be unnecessary to relate at present ; but if you ask me the employment I prefer, it is painting.”

“ Painting ? and glazing, too ? All right, we will find you a job in the village.”

“ I beg your pardon, sir ; you mistake me ; I did not refer to the mechanical, but to the artistic brush—painting from nature, portraits of animals, sir, horses in particular, in the style of Sir Edwin and other great masters.”

“ Oh, indeed ! An artist, are you ? Here, Sam, bring me a burnt stick, and look sharp about it.” Sam flew to obey, curiosity lending wings to duty. “ Now, Mr. Trail, there is a clean surface of whitewash for you, and for a subject, bring out the old pony, Sam.”

The pony, too old for anything but the lightest of menial work to keep him in health, was set before his master. “ There, my fine fellow, sketch him off on that wall, and then we shall see what you are fit for.”

Trail stepped forward, noways discomposed ; placed his subject, not without sundry snaps of resentment, in several different positions before he was satisfied ; and having informed Sam that he should want “ no end of sticks,” set to work on the wall as desired, producing an outline tolerably executed, and if not exactly like the original, yet sufficiently distinct as a quadruped to create not a little admiration in the stable-yard. Those who had not deigned to notice the vagrant overnight, began to look on him with a certain amount of wonder and respect.

“ Ah,” said Harcourt, as the artist turned for his criticism, “ very much in Sir Edwin’s style, as you say. But how are we to get you colours and brushes ? We

do not keep those things here. Have you any of your own?"

"I had, sir, and I painted a favourite donkey for mine host of the Chequers, Durningham, last week, but he was mean enough to detain my tools afterwards for a paltry debt. I could redeem them if I had the means."

"Will a sovereign do it?"

"I have no doubt it would, sir, and leave a surplus."

"Then there is one for you. Fetch your tools, as you call them, and do not stop to drink the surplus out there. I have a notion our tap is better than the Chequers."

"It is, I am bound in honour to testify. Can I have the pleasure of doing anything for Mr. Percival at Durningham?"

"Nothing, Trail," said the young clergyman, rather sternly. "The only thing I asked you to do for me there, you left undone, after all your promises. I must see proof of amendment before I trust you further."

He turned away as he spoke, vexation so strongly marked on his features, that Miss Porchester could not help remarking, "You do not seem quite pleased by this revelation of talent."

"How can I be? Here is a man, whose ruin has been desultory habits and self-indulgence; and the only chance of reforming him would have been a course of steady, quiet labour, under careful teaching; to set him in a stable-yard, daubing canvas and drinking beer, is just to confirm him in his most dangerous notions."

"I doubt his coming back at all," said Roland, "and I shall think we are let off cheaply with a sovereign. Here comes the Doctor's carriage; Harcourt, if he is very mad that Sir Edwin has hopped off without leave, mind I am innocent this time. I can't face him again, so I shall go after Stella's lost box."

Doctor Wartop was in better humour, however, this morning; and after visiting his patients, came into the drawing-room to shake hands with the ladies, and report as much as he chose of Miss Egerton's progress. Mrs. Brudenell had been waiting for his visit, before going

home to see after her household, and Stella volunteered to be nurse during her absence.

"I only desire," said the Doctor, as he drew on his gloves, "that you leave strict orders, Mrs. Brudenell—orders no one will dare to infringe—against unauthorised practitioners. No interference with my treatment if you please. There is a dangerous person not a hundred miles from this table"—he threw a side-glance at Percival, who was turning over Stella photographs—"a very dangerous person, who is a great deal too fond of meddling with patients that do not belong to him. He has two grand ideas on the subject of health; one, that however ill you may be, and however bad the weather, whenever it pleases him to ring the bells, you are to go to church; and the other, that whatever your complaint, you are to be allowed as much wine, and fruit (generally unripe) as he can carry in his pockets. The battles I have had to fight on those two points would fill a volume. So, Miss Porchester, in Mrs. Brudenell's absence, I hold you responsible; no surreptitious conveying of forbidden things into Miss Egerton's room, if you please."

"Never fear, Dr. Wartop," said she, playing with the rose Roland had gathered; "whatever I give her will be perfectly wholesome, and what I am sure you would approve."

"Yes, yes, all very well, but when she begins to get about a little, as I hope she will soon, I must have her protected. Do you hear, Percival? I will not have my patient's conscience coerced at the risk of her life. One or the other of us may attend, but not both."

"What have you to do with conscience, Doctor?" asked Cecil, with a curl of his lip. "I should have imagined that was out of your province."

"So it is when it keeps to its own; but if it invades my territory, I must take it in hand. I have no doubt I could preach to your charges as well as you can prescribe for mine."

"Preach? Ay, but whose doctrine? I never met with one of your profession yet who understood the being with whom he had to do. Man is born to suffer,

and endure, and deny himself, and live hardly ; and you surround him from his cradle with precautions and luxuries ; he is to be kept warm, and lie soft, and feed on the best ; and duty is to give place to health, and self-denial is not to interfere with comfort ; and if it be absolutely necessary, for gain, or advantage, that he should sacrifice himself to his hire, one thing he may always safely give up to your ban—and that is God's public worship. The woman may break her back at her wash-tub, or crawl to her marketing, when her knees knock together with weakness—you will say it is necessary, and cannot be helped ; but if the poor soul drags her tired body through the rain to the house of prayer, to join in the service that is to give her new strength, you tell her, as you did poor Jessy Bell, that if she chooses to kill herself by inches, you will not attend her any more.”

“ Well, if I did, I have had to break my word, for she is laid up with a worse cough than ever. You would make my fortune, if the patients could only pay. But wait till you call me in yourself, and then see if I do not clear off old scores.”

“ I do not return the injunction, Doctor. It will be dangerous for *you* to wait till you have to send for *me*: yet stronger and bolder men have done so before now.”

“ Ah, yes, there is no saying to what shifts one may be driven, certainly,” said the Doctor ; “ and it is well to be prepared for the worst.” And away he went, before the enemy could bring his guns to bear again for another shot. Mrs. Brudenell exchanged a few words with him in the hall, and then came to tell Percival she must go home for an hour or so, and would be obliged to him to look in at the school, and pay one or two visits for her that morning. He promised, and meant to keep his promise, and Stella meant to go up to Marion’s room directly, but the Doctor’s sarcasms led to a conversation which interested both, and they neglected to notice how time was passing. It might be that there was something enticing to Miss Porchester in the enthusiasm that spoke out so boldly on subjects which are generally kept back, as well as in the satisfaction of seeing his unpromising

silence exchanged for eager appeals to her judgment and sympathy ; but she found herself led on to say more than she originally intended, and, without being knowingly untrue, to express more than she had ever actually felt. She really did feel it while she was speaking, and having committed herself by speech, resolved to show she was in earnest ; so that before he left her, to fulfil his neglected duties, she had engaged herself to begin attendance on the early service, and was promised books and chants enough to be almost alarming. She laughed inwardly, as she went up-stairs, at her own sudden conversion, as she called it, and yet she felt under a kind of spell, through whose medium life looked different, and might be, a great deal happier. After all, if what he said were true, there was something grand in his views ; it was a noble way of looking at things, and she could remember early days, when she had had dreams like his, over Sunday allegories and Scripture prints ; but that was very long ago, and they were childish, after all. You could not go on all your life believing in white robes, and shadows in a garden. How earnest he was, and how amusing to find he could forget his appointments, and the work he thought so much of, in the pleasure of her society ! She hoped, she felt pretty sure too, that they should see him often ; he had as good as promised to come again soon, and there was a smile on her lips as she thought how they had shaken hands in a hurry at the last, and what a pressure he had given hers. The smile was still there when she opened the invalid's door, and glided to her bedside. Marion lifted her heavy eyelids, and smiled in return—the first gleam of her former self that had been seen since that terrible night at Baden. She put out her hand to meet Stella's, and they remained looking at each other in silence for some minutes.

" You are better," said Miss Porchester, presently, " and it is time you were, or I should have been afraid to ask you to forgive me." She drew a chair by the bed, and sat down, still caressing Marion's feverish hand.

" It was my fault that we had those horses, and I suppose

Harcourt could not bear that anybody should drive one but himself. He spoils one, rather, you know."

" You were thinking of him as you came in," whispered Marion, for she could not talk without an effort ; " I saw it by your smile."

" Did you, indeed ? Does no one ever smile without thinking of somebody else ?"

" When they look so happy, they must be thinking of some one they love."

" I will not argue the point, my dear ; but since you are so knowing, can you guess who gathered this rose for you ?"

" How sweet and fresh it looks. No ; I can only tell you *he* did *not*."

" Why ?"

" You would not part with it if he had."

" Do you know, my dear, I am rather afraid of you ; that knock on the head has made you supernaturally wise. You have quite a weird look as you lie there, that dismays me. Did you sleep last night ?"

" Part of the time, when the pain would let me."

" You have had a narrow escape."

" I suppose I have ; the Doctor said it was more the shock than the blow that stunned me so long, for that in reality I was not much hurt." Her eyes had begun to glow with the exertion of speaking, in a manner that would have warned an experienced nurse to leave her quiet ; but Stella knew nothing of nursing, except in theory, and thought a little cheerful conversation that amused the visitor, was always a good remedy for the sick.

" You do not ask who gathered your rose ; I conclude you know without asking. I promised to give it you when your aunt was not by—first, because a little secrecy enhances every pleasure, by giving it the appearance of being forbidden ; and secondly, because Mrs. Brudenell snubs him whenever he talks of his love for you. There, I do not want you to answer me," for the colour had rushed up to Marion's temples, " and it is very audacious of him to speak of it at all—*mais, que voulez-vous ?* with a

great boy who has been spoiled and humoured all his life, and cannot understand why everything should not be as he wishes all in a minute. They are both good fellows, different as they are in their ways. Everybody will tell you that."

"I am sure of it," said Marion; "they have been very good to me."

"You are a good little thing yourself, and no one could help caring for you. I wish your hand was not so hot; you must have had a wretched night, I am afraid."

"It seemed a long one, very long. I do not know what o'clock it was when I went to sleep, but I had a strange dream, and I cannot forget it. The first part was mixed up with all sorts of confused nonsense, but at last, I thought I was lying here, I did not know why, and there was a strange noise outside, like the roaring of the sea, or of people's voices, and they were calling me to escape directly, for my life—but I could not move, and I could not call out for help; and then I thought your cousin, Mr. Clarendon, came and lifted me in his arms, and carried me out, I did not know where, but I found we were on a slippery plank, and the roaring of water below us, and there seemed to be a crowd of boats full of people watching us, and I saw *his* face—your cousin Roland's—looking up angrily, and very pale. I felt Mr. Clarendon stagger on the plank, and begged him to put me down and save himself, and he said, 'No, both or neither.' And he made a spring forwards, and I woke with a scream, I think, for my aunt came to me directly, and asked what was the matter."

"Well she might, and no wonder you were shaken by such a dream. After all that was talked and planned, your first acquaintance with Morlands has been made under unkindly auspices. But you must not be low-spirited, or allow yourself to dwell upon gloomy things; you will soon be better, and then we will all enjoy ourselves together. I dare say we shall stay some time, now we are here, and I have a fancy for learning country ways and parochial duties. Your uncle's curate is an

old acquaintance, and he has been lecturing me this morning till I feel as if I had wasted half my life. I dare say I have."

"I know that feeling," whispered Marion.

"And so, no doubt, you lie here thinking about it, and fretting that you cannot get up and be doing great things directly."

"No, it did not occur to me to fret, when it is not my own fault, and I know I am in England. I used, at one time, to dream of *that*, and when I awoke I could have fretted, only I knew it was of no use, and wrong into the bargain."

"I rather fancy, in your place, that would have made me fret all the more. Ah, you do not know what a wicked set of people we are in England; we are not quite what the little story-books make us out to be; we are not at all devoted to going to church, and visiting old women, as a rule; and however we may plume ourselves on knowing so much more of what is right than our neighbours, we never practise it, if it interferes with our inclinations. Mr. Percival may well storm about the laxity of our obedience to Church rules and discipline. He has half made a convert of me, and quite of Roland; but Harcourt, as you know, plays fast and loose with such things, and talks, at times, as if he believed in nothing."

It was new to hear Miss Porchester speak on such a topic; but the dearer it was to Marion's heart, the less she could talk about it then. Her eyes alone expressed interest and sympathy, and Stella, unaware how much mischief she might be doing, relieved her own feelings from the tumult into which Cecil had stirred them, by talking on as if thinking aloud—telling of childish aspirations, faults, beginnings, and failures—of illusions dispelled by contact with indifference, and the gradual hardening that goes on under habitual self-pleasing—as freely as if she had been describing some one else. Not that a description of any one else would have been half as graphic, for there is a strange witchery in speaking of ourselves, that makes even faults and failures interesting to recall, especially when we feel assured that

the more we confess and lament, the higher our listener esteems us.

All this time Mrs. Brudenell had not returned; and when Stella went down at last to luncheon, she found a note explaining that she was detained by the danger of a poor child who was badly burnt, and might not be back for some hours; she relied on Stella's taking care of Marion, according to Dr. Wartop's orders, and she would return the instant she could. There were several other sick people who depended on her visits and supplies, and as the Vicar was going to London the next day, he had been obliged to drive over and secure Mr. Graham's assistance for Sunday. The charge thus left on Miss Porchester's shoulders rather pleased her than otherwise, as she flattered herself she had already done a good morning's work in rousing and cheering her patient, whose eyes, as she said, looked ten times the brighter for her visit. She fully meant to go back and stay with her all day, to ensure her being properly attended to; but being detained by visitors, did not find herself at liberty till nearly four o'clock. Suspecting Marion would be asleep, she moved as lightly as she could, opening the door without a sound, and stepping with velvet foot to her patient's bedside. Marion's eyes were closed, and the flush of the morning had passed away, leaving her very pale, but so quiet, her nurse would have supposed she was really sleeping, but for the faint pressure the small fingers gave to hers, as she sat down by the bed. The door of the adjoining dressing-room had been left ajar, to admit the air from its window, and after she had been watching about half an hour, Miss Porchester heard two silken gowns go rustling in, tea being just over in the housekeeper's room. Presently two voices began to whisper, and from whispering to talking in an under tone, but as Marion still held her hand, and seemed to have fallen into a doze, she could not rise to warn them or close the door.

"Well, now, you do surprise me, Mrs. Jones, to be sure," murmured the sedate accents of Mrs. Peters, the housekeeper, "for if ever two young people seemed born,

as one may say, to understand each other, I should have said it was them two."

"Yes, they may understand each other—I don't say they don't," returned Mrs. Jones, whose voice nature had gifted with a vixenish snappishness, aggravated by any ruffling of temper into a snarl, and to whom that day had brought sundry aggravations that by no means lessened those of the journey. "I don't say they don't," she repeated, with colloquial disregard of euphony, "but it is not everybody that gains by being understood too well, and he has seen enough of her temper to think twice before making a bargain. I'm sure if I had known what she was, I'd never have gone abroad with them, not if her ma had gone down on her bended knees, as she has next to done, scores and scores of times, to beg me to stop. But as to being mistress here, Mrs. Peters, she's no more likely to be that, to my certain knowledge, than you or I."

"You don't say so. Dear me, I should say that would be a great disappointment."

"I hope it will, with all my heart. But you'll have a mistress, for all that, and a nice young lady she is, though not with the style of the other, to be sure, and what could you expect when she has no maid of her own, and as Mr. Auguste told me, never had any one even to brush her hair?"

Here the voices dropped for a time, but soon swelled as the discussion grew warmer.

"I tell you, Mr. Auguste told me himself; a very civil-spoken person, as those foreigners are, you know; it isn't every day they have a real Englishwoman to speak to, and they think a deal of it. Why, he asked me more questions about our ways, and salaries, and what one made and saved, and one's little perquisites, and such-like, than any other gentleman I ever met. He seemed quite struck when I told him I had forty pound put by, as, between ourselves, I have. Poor man, he was quite low at our going away, and when people are low, they talk, you know, and that is how he came to tell me this. But mind now, you tell nobody, for your life, or I don't know what would become of us."

Mrs. Peters promised to be as silent as the grave. Stella could not have moved now, had she thought of so doing.

"Well, then—you're sure Miss Egerton is asleep?—Auguste he told me that he heard with his own ears his master talking about it to Mr. Clarendon the night he died, when they was alone together——"

"Them three," suggested Mrs. Peters.

"No, they two, of course. Mr. Saville sent all away but your master, and Auguste went into the next room, where there was a partition that didn't reach the ceiling, and he couldn't help hearing, you know. It was not his fault, they spoke loud."

"Of course not."

"And he is not quite so bright in his English as he thinks he is, but he understood this much, anyhow—that your master said——"

"Will you give me some water?" interrupted Marion's weak voice. Stella started to her feet, the first thought darting through her brain being the question, "Had she been listening too?" But this was no moment for inquiry; the state of her patient demanded instant attention, as the conviction soon forced itself on her understanding that what she had mistaken for quiet sleep had really been exhaustion. With a pang of remorse, she recalled Mrs. Brudenell's orders, and remembered how little they had been obeyed; and alarmed by Miss Egerton's faintness and languor, she was obliged to call in Mrs. Peters. Some little time was spent in mutual explanation about what each had supposed the other to have done; but between them, they so far revived the invalid that she had in some degree recovered breath and complexion by the time Mrs. Brudenell returned, too spent herself with her fatiguing day to be quite as quick-sighted as usual. Stella, therefore, only received thanks and praise, and made her escape as soon as she could, without a word or look having passed between her and Marion, to solve the doubt as to what she had overheard.

How Miss Porchester passed the next hour, as it was in solitude, we have no means of knowing; but a short

time before the post hour, she went down into the drawing-room, and meeting Harcourt, gaily claimed his acknowledgments, as head-nurse of his Château de la Garaye. She only hoped his experiment in the stable-yard might prove as eminently successful as hers on the first floor; always provided his wandering artist had returned, which seemed doubtful. Returned? to be sure he was, and busily at work, according to his notion of being busy—half his time being spent in standing with his hands behind him, staring at what he had done and smoking cigars. “He asked for some,” Harcourt continued, “as Claude Melnotte might have asked of Beau-séant, and I could only offer him my case, and request he would help himself. To do him justice, he knows a good weed from a bad one. I am sorry to tell you, Stella, by-the-bye, that Roland can hear nothing of your missing box; he spitefully conjectures it has been left behind at Baden.”

“Very likely,” said she, with a slight start; “then I shall write a line directly to Gervase Wray, and beg him to see about it. Have you any message?” as she sat down at the writing-table, and opened the portfolio.

“None, thank you, unless you like to remind him of my parting warning.”

“I must know first what it was.”

“Simply, that if he fell in with Lepelletier, and got into any mess at the tables, I would not help him out.”

“Charming; as if a threat of that kind ever stopped anybody yet. I will remind him by all means. Be so good as to find me a stamp.”

When Harcourt returned with the article required, the letter was closed and directed. One paragraph ran as follows:

“I have just discovered that Mr. S.’s valet, Auguste, told some foolish story to Jones about his master’s last words to H. C., which Jones, of course, retails with exaggerations. I should not take the trouble to notice such gossip, if I were not afraid of mischief being made, by using people’s names, and spreading reports. Find the man, and get the truth from him—you will best know

how, and on what terms. H. has just told me of his ‘warning’ to you. Of course it is unnecessary; and of course you feel pretty safe, while you have friends at home to take your part!”

CHAPTER IX.

STELLA CARRIES HER POINT.

FROM whatever cause—the Doctor and nurses were divided in opinion thereon, and fought stoutly for their respective theories—Marion Egerton’s recovery was much slower than had been at first anticipated. It was nearly a fortnight before she left her bed, and three weeks before she could be brought down stairs. Unaccustomed to illness, and still more to being the first object of attention, it was all strange and new to her, and made her realise how entirely her life had changed its tone. It seemed very long now since that night at Baden-Baden; and the period before it had faded into a dim obscure, that gave her the sensation of having suddenly grown old.

It was a fortunate illness for her, however, for the weakness and languor dulled the mental pain, and she could think of Mr. Saville with a softened regret, in which his faults were, if not forgotten, at least tenderly veiled. And one ever present source of comfort she had now, in the love she had awakened in the bosom of her aunt. Mrs. Brudenell would not have believed, had she been told, how her husband’s niece would usurp dominion in her heart, filling up that void which nothing else had filled, since those two little graves were dug in the churchyard, many years ago. Suspecting that there had been some neglect that first day, she devoted herself to the sick-room afterwards, allowing her parochial duties to be performed by deputy; and never, in Marion’s recollection, had she been so lovingly tended, so watched, caressed, and served. Quick and short as her aunt’s manner and speech might be to others, it was always

gentle in the invalid's room ; her patience never wearied, her resources never failed, in devising methods for giving ease or refreshment to her newly-found treasure ; and what all this was to the orphan's heart may readily be imagined. It was more like a dream than a reality to have found a second mother in her strange native land ; and she gave herself up to the joy of the new affection, with all the confidence of a loving and truthful nature. She found herself talking to her, more freely than she had ever believed possible, of her past troubles and sorrows, and Mrs. Brudenell, whatever she thought, was too tender of her darling's feelings for the dead to say a word of Mr. Saville that could give her pain—still less of the mother, who in Marion's estimation could do no wrong. She touched as lightly as truth would permit on all that was painful in their history, dwelling only on what Marion loved to hear, the excellences of the father, and attractions of the home, now become a vision, in which she had seen Helen so beloved—in which she was thought to be so happy. She did not tell her that Helen's brother was all this while detained in London by the state of her child's affairs ; “business” was a sufficient reason, and Marion asked no questions.

Another subject was left untouched upon, though it was often on Mrs. Brudenell's lips. Roland had behaved with tolerable patience during this interval, and was very discreet when any one was by ; but he watched for opportunities of catching his old friend alone, to give vent to his longings for a sight of Marion, and his ardent desire to be doing something for her comfort or relief. And however good-humouredly she might laugh, or however conscientiously she might scold, she was too fond of him not to feel a great deal of sympathy for his romantic attachment, and was often on the verge of naming it to her niece. But Marion was shy on this point, and gave her no opening ; and prudence carried the day. It would be quite time enough when she was strong and well, and she was resolved the confidence should begin on the young lady's side.

“We shall soon go back to the Vicarage now, my

dear," she said, the day that Marion was allowed to go down-stairs, when she had arranged her comfortably on the sofa in the small morning-room, where she would be safe from casual visitors, "and really I am ashamed of having encroached so long on the hospitality of these boys. They would have had the house full of gay visitors for Stella, but for disturbing you. Indeed, I begged them to have their friends and give their parties, as it was, and promised you should know nothing about it, but they were as obstinate as mules. They must invite people for the 1st of September, I suppose, and we might contrive to get you home by that day."

Marion assented, but not with much alacrity. Her eyes were drinking in the quiet beauty of the view from the window; the lawn and flower-beds still retaining some of their summer colouring—the woods beyond, untouched as yet by autumn change—looked so fair and attractive after her sick chamber, that she did not feel, at the moment, in a hurry to depart. Roland might well, she thought, speak fondly of his home; it was a spot to love indeed, with all one's heart. How kind every one had been to her ever since she came into it! How attentive all the nice English servants were—looking as if to wait upon her were a pleasure; how courteous it was of the brothers to set aside all other engagements and pleasures on her account; and how amiable of Stella Porchester to be satisfied that it should be so. And Aunt Brudenell—was ever any one so kind, so full of thought and tenderness, for one she had only known so short a time, and only then as a trouble? The glistening of her eyes as all this crossed her mind, made her aunt anxiously inquire if the move had been too much for her strength. "Oh no!" she said, quickly, "everything looks so beautiful, I feel as if I should grow stronger every minute."

"Then I may safely admit two visitors, who have been worrying to come in the last ten minutes. Here, Harcourt and Roland, you may pay her your respects, if you like; but if you tire her too much, I shall have to carry her up-stairs again."

They had already had glimpses of their guest at the

window, and for a few minutes' visit, when she had been moved into the dressing-room for a change ; so there was little to agitate her in the present less restrained interview ; and the meeting was mutually agreeable. Marion expressed her admiration of Morlands in terms that delighted Roland, and she would have said something of what she felt for all their kindness, had she been allowed ; but this was stopped by Harcourt directly. As to her being taken away to the Vicarage, just as she was recovering sufficiently for them to enjoy her society, they would not hear of such a thing. Harcourt did not want anybody bothering on the 1st ; partridges were not too plentiful that year, and Gervase would want his share when he came ; he had no intention of asking anybody at present, and every intention of keeping Miss Egerton till she was able to walk home. It would be too hard on them not to be allowed a little of the pleasure of her society. And as they were both very resolute and clamorous on this point, Marion's voice had no chance of being listened to, and she was fain to leave it to be decided by her aunt—quite capable, she knew, of fighting her own battles against anybody. The gentlemen were ordered off sooner than they at all approved ; and before Marion had quite recovered from the excitement, in came Mrs. Porchester, for what she called a quiet chat.

“ Such a comfort to see you down at last, my dear ; I am sure I began to despair at one time, and to think there must be some very serious mischief, in spite of all Stella could say. I have not much faith in you young people ; you always will persist you know so much better than your elders, and pooh-pooh one when one says a word, and I hardly ever do say anything, on that very account. Delighted to have you down, my dear Miss Egerton, for you cannot conceive how dull it has been all this time ; not a soul to meet us at dinner but that young Mr. Percival, whom one is afraid to speak to, he takes one up so short, and grudges every morsel one puts inside one's lips. I am sure no one is more sorry for poor people than I am, and I would give him a sovereign for soup and things, with pleasure, if he asked me ; but, dear

me, one can't help there being distress in the world, and it is very hard if one may never have a meal in peace, because other people have to live on odds and ends. And that is not all; one might put up with it if it were to do anybody any good; but he talks about one's indulging oneself, and enjoying good things too much, and makes such a to-do about what one eats and what one drinks, that positively, when he is here, I don't get half my dinner. A most excellent young man he is, I am convinced, and does a vast deal of good, no doubt; and I do not say he ever interfered with me personally, he is too gentlemanly for that, but it was talking *at* me, which is worse, and makes me more nervous than anything. A most worthy young man, I am sure, and Stella and he are fast friends, and she gets up at I don't know what o'clock to go church, making Jones so cross I am almost afraid to ring my bell; and she has been to the schools, though I can't make out that she did anything there; and she practises the most dismal psalm-tunes on the piano that you can possibly conceive, and actually has taken to painting great texts in all sorts of colours, to hang up in the schoolroom and on people's walls. Quite right, you know, that they should have texts to read, and most delightful to do, and a great help they will be to the children and people, if they can only make them out, which, I am ashamed to say, I can't; but then I am old, you know, and all these fine alphabets had not been invented in my time."

Marion listened with her usual patient civility, rather glad that it was unnecessary to do more towards entertaining Mrs. Porchester than to keep up a decent attention; for though she seldom spoke fast, she rarely made pauses, and it was wonderful how much she contrived to say in a given space of time, with a limited amount of subject-matter. Miss Egerton was a special favourite, because she always looked attentive, and never broke in with interruptions; though, of course, as a companion, she was not to be mentioned in the same breath with Stella, who interrupted whenever it pleased her, and hardly ever looked attentive at all.

"Not in the least what I expected it would be when we visited Morlands—not in the least. It was always planned that we were to have the house full, and be perpetually making excursions, and giving out-of-door parties, and have all sorts of gaieties going on. And Stella feels it, of course, I can see, by her manner to Harcourt; and how those two will ever go through life together I cannot imagine, for, considering how devoted they are to each other, they never agree for five minutes, and both like their own way, and that, we all know, is not an easy thing to get at any time; nobody knows it better than I do. When you young people are as old as I am, you will find you have to give up to one another, and very disagreeable it is, and I am sure I never would if I could help it—is it likely? But, as I was saying, here is Stella, instead of taking an interest, like a sensible girl, in her cousin's plans and improvements, and his farm, and his horses, and all his little cranks and whims, as I have advised her to do over and over again, makes a point of finding fault with his pet notions, and runs after that young man—most excellent and well-meaning he is, as I always say, and so dreadfully opiniated, he won't let anybody speak but himself; and Stella is always on his side in every argument, and perhaps she is wise, for you have no peace if you are not, and very little if you are."

It was no news to Marion that Miss Porchester and the curate were such allies, for in Stella's visits she had often named him, and interested her listener considerably by retailing his conversation, or such parts of it as could be retailed. Of Harcourt, on the other hand, she seldom talked at all, or only in a sarcastic manner, as if to show how little she cared for him; but what this really meant Miss Egerton could not determine. She thought she should judge better when she saw them all together, and had her first opportunity that evening, when she was allowed to join them at tea. Percival had been asked to dine, but could only arrive in time for dessert; and when they were all in the drawing-room, it was palpable to everybody that he had eyes and ears for one person alone, and that was Miss Porchester. It was equally

plain that she admitted his attentions, and treated him with a deference she rarely vouchsafed to any admirer; but that she was in earnest as he was, Marion doubted strongly. Like many other quiet-looking people, Miss Egerton was much given to observation of character, and, if deficient in experience, had the advantage of a natural affinity for truth. Anything like a sham betrayed itself to her perception, she hardly knew how; and notwithstanding all Mr. Percival's evident faith in Stella's sympathy, it struck Marion that evening that she was more like one acting a part than expressing what she really felt. To herself their talk was interesting, when carried on near enough for her to listen, for it was on topics of which she had heard comparatively little, and longed to know a great deal more; and when Miss Porchester was assenting so warmly to propositions he laid down on the necessity of the upper classes setting example, taking the lead, and maintaining openly by their lives what they professed, Marion could have been angry with herself for recollecting how differently she had heard her speak abroad, and how little had been shown of such principles in the habits of her travelling life. Something of this she might have shown in her face, for Harcourt presently came over to her sofa, to show her a particular woodcut in the *Illustrated London News*. Having fenced her in with himself, by the help of the voluminous sheets, he quietly remarked, as if in answer to a remark of hers, "I quite agree with you."

"About what?" asked she, as, of course, he expected.

"In wondering how long such fevers generally last. Some are very fierce, and soon over; and some go smouldering on for an awful time. Much depends on the constitution, I suppose."

Marion guessed his meaning, but did not choose to own it, and felt rather uncomfortable.

"Were you aware," he went on, in the same undertone, "that Stella held all these orthodox notions? for they have taken me by surprise."

Marion reluctantly admitted that they surprised her

also ; but, nettled by the sarcasm of his manner, added, with spirit, " I am sure they are quite right."

" Oh, you are, are you ? May I ask on what grounds ?"

" It must be right to be as good and to do as much good as we can," persisted she, flushing under the consciousness that whatever argument she might bring forward, he was prepared to demolish.

" Very well, but the question remains—how is this to be done ?"

" That is a question, indeed," said Marion, shaking her head, " and the world has fought about it long enough. Why must we begin ?"

" I understood you to feel confident that those two spirited people at the table were quite right in their theories, that is all."

" So I believe them to be, for they have the authority of the Church to support them."

" That is reason enough, you think."

" Of course it is."

" Where did you learn that ? In your *pension* ? Because you might get into an awkward jumble of Churches there."

" They had nothing to do with me on those points. My dear mother had been taught by Uncle Julian, and what he told her she told me."

" Your Uncle Julian is one of the few, very few men I know who could almost persuade any one to think with him ; but 'almost' is as stiff a gate to get over as it was in the days of King Agrippa, and some of us stop all our lives on the wrong side."

" So much the worse. May I ask you a question, Mr. Clarendon ?"

" Whatever you please."

" Why do you make yourself out to be more indifferent than you are ? Why do you pretend to care for nothing, when you are so kind and good to others, as I, at least, have a right to say you are ?"

He looked at her with a strangely softened expression in his eyes. " I only wish to be known as I really am, to you and to all my friends. That I have had pleasure,

and always should have, in doing you any service in my power, does not make me a bit nearer being what you, or Uncle Julian, or our saints there, would call *good*, or sound, or orthodox, or fit for anything but to point a moral and adorn a tale, as a frightful example of the effects of reading bad books, and resisting good sermons. You see I have not the shadow of an excuse : I cannot pretend my parish priest is in fault, for I have one of the best men in England ; therefore my case is a bad one. I don't care for these things, and what becomes of 'don't care' we have all been taught from our cradles."

Roland came in at that moment. He had been on his customary visit to the stables, and as he passed Stella, whispered that the greys were all right again. There had been something amiss with them since the accident, which had prevented the proposed rebellious movement from being executed ; but it was not on that account abandoned. Stella's face brightened at the news. "To-morrow, then !" she said, imperatively. He smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at Harcourt. "Yes," she continued, "it must be to-morrow, for he will be out all day on business."

"For shame, Stella, to propose such a sneaking trick !"

"Oh ! if you dare me to tell him, I have no objection. Harcourt, we mean to drive the greys to-morrow, do you hear ? That carriage your man sent over will do very well for an experiment ; no difficulty whatever."

"I see one," said he, without raising his eyes from his paper.

"What may that be ?"

"No servant of mine will put the horses to."

"You maintain that against my positive assertion ?"

"I merely state a fact. Any servant disobeying my orders in this matter, from that moment ceases to be my servant."

"And any relation, sir ?"

"Can hardly be said to be my friend."

There was silence. Harcourt laid down the paper, and walked out upon the terrace ; upon which Roland

promptly took his place by Marion's side. Luckily for him, Mrs. Brudenell had taken up a story that so absorbed her (she seldom having time for any such luxurious recreation), that she saw nothing beyond her nose, except her book ; and Mrs. Porchester, though supposed to be similarly employed, was, by this time, past seeing even that.

"Did Harcourt startle you?" he asked, sinking his voice in turn, and taking up the useful *Illustrated London News*.

"He did rather ; what does it all mean?"

"Why, that there is a match going on between self-will and obstinacy. Stella vows she will have another drive with the greys, and Harcourt that they shall not be driven ; and very aggravating he is about it, I must confess. But nothing will convince Stella, that when he makes up his mind as decidedly as he has on this point, no power on earth can turn him. She is only the more bent on having her own way, for the mere pleasure of the victory. I know how it will be—there will be no end of a row, and I shall be in the thick of it, whether I like it or not."

"But if you are firm, your cousin must give way."

"Yes, if I am—but between ourselves, holding in the greys is a joke, compared to pulling against Stella. Let her get the bit between her teeth, and she will run away with a railway van. We shall have you out now soon, I hope. There is plenty of pretty country for you to admire, though nothing quite like the Jungfrau. I always think of her as of a dear friend."

Marion lifted her eyes to his, and the glance encouraged him to drop his voice still lower, so low, indeed, that the rest of the conversation being heard only by themselves, cannot be transcribed for the benefit of the reader.

Whether it had a salutary influence on the young lady's nervous system, aiding nature to regain tone and strength, may be left an open question, but certainly Marion Egerton's recovery became rapid from that evening. She was well enough the next day to rise and dress immediately after her breakfast, and Mrs. Brudenell, seeing her

look bright and cheerful, left her in the morning-room with her books and work, while she walked into the village to see after some of the people, whom she had on her account neglected. Harcourt had ridden off early to transact his business in the market town, some miles off; and Stella, finding there was no chance of Cecil Percival being at liberty to call that morning, resolved on carrying out her cherished scheme. She hunted Roland out of his easy-chair, in which he was reading out bits of news for the amusement of his aunt and Miss Egerton, and gave him no peace till he went with her into the stable, and had the greys brought out for inspection.

Trail, engaged on the likeness of the old Newfoundland dog in his kennel—an operation of some delicacy, as the sitter would not allow him to come within a certain distance without tearing at his chain to demolish him—eyed the cousins as they stood consulting together, with a sneer on his face that unluckily caught Roland's notice.

“Perhaps your work would get on faster if you attended to your easel, and not to what does not concern you, my man,” he said, sharply, as the artist sat whistling to himself, and listening in a lazy attitude to the remonstrances of coachman and groom. “Let me find you showing any impertinence, and I shall give you a lesson you will not easily forget.”

The man bowed sullenly, with no attempt at Claude Melnotte dignity. He seemed to be conscious that young Clarendon despised him, and was generally somewhat cowed by his presence, giving him an occasional side-look of hatred, as he resumed his brush, that would have been very effective on the stage, but was quite thrown away on its object. He dashed the colours on the canvas, to the detriment of his likeness, muttering to himself something about Mr. Clarendon being his employer, which Roland did not care to hear. How to satisfy Stella without vexing his brother, was quite enough to absorb his attention for the time, as the more she was dissuaded from her purpose, the more wilfully determined she grew.

“It comes to this, Roland,” she said at last, pressing

the arm on which she leaned with both hands, and smiling in his face, “either I drive to-day, or I leave you to-morrow. Take your choice ; on that point I *can* decide, and can be as obstinate as anybody.”

“ Nobody in their senses ever doubted that,” said he ; “ and I suppose you must have your way, so the sooner it is over the better. Put them to, Jack ; if we smash Boyce’s turn out, we must make it good, that is all.”

The carriage supplied by Mr. Boyce, the coachmaker, while their own was being repaired, was heavier than the latter, and the weight would tell on the horses, he knew. It was brought out immediately, but respectful remonstrances again arose when the order for harnessing was given. Master’s orders had been very strict indeed, and Mr. Roland knew he did not often make a point of a thing, but when he did—

“ Stand out of the way, all of you,” broke in Roland, in his anger and vexation ; “ I will put them to myself, and trouble nobody.”

He began immediately, but Jack, a youthful retainer in whose eyes “the young master” was the model of all that was glorious and great, muttered that he shouldn’t do that, let who would say no—and if Mr. Roland took the risk, so would he. So the greys were put into the carriage, Roland and Jack on the box, and Miss Porchester inside. The horses went out of the yard, as Bowles remarked, “like lambs,” and they drove through the park and village without any misadventure.

Marion, left to her own devices, grew tired of work and of Mrs. Porchester’s conversation, and felt a lively desire to see a little more of the house ; as much for the pleasure of using her recovered strength, as for gratifying her curiosity. Falling into the hands of Mrs. Peters at the onset, and being compelled, whether she liked it or not, to swallow a cup of that inevitable beef-tea, that waters, so to speak, the pathway of convalescence, she easily prevailed upon her to be her guide. The house was a large one, successive owners having added to it at different times, and some of the apartments were only

occasionally used. There were some fine Spanish pictures, more interesting to Miss Egerton than the family portraits, on which the housekeeper delighted to dwell, and by these she would gladly have lingered longer, but she soon became aware that her strength was not so much restored as she had imagined, and that an easy lounge through the rooms would be as much as she should be able to accomplish.

“Where does that door lead to?”

They had just come out of the ball-room, in which Mrs. Peters told her the Prince Regent had danced with the Miss Clarendon of his day, considered the greatest beauty in the county, and very like Mr. Roland in the eyes and complexion. The room had a French painted ceiling, and dated back as far as the time of James the Second. Exactly opposite was the door in question, which the housekeeper was about to pass.

“That door, ma’am? It leads into my master’s private apartments. Did he never tell you of them? He has several small rooms opening into each other, where he sometimes—not often—I have only known him to do it some five or six times—shuts himself up entirely, perhaps for a week, and lets no one go near him but myself. I carry him his meals, and make his bed, and do everything he wants, and he is at home to nobody, not even to Mr. Brudenell, or Mr. Graves, the steward, whatever business there may be waiting. The last time he did so, was while Mr. Roland was at college, and, to be sure, the work he did meanwhile was beautiful. He has quite a carpenter’s shop in there, and handles the tools as if he had his bread to earn, he do, indeed, ma’am. Perhaps you would like to see the rooms, ma’am? I am sure *you* may go anywhere you please in this house, and I always take care of the keys.”

Marion admitted she should, if it were no intrusion, which she rather felt it would be. However, Mrs. Peters was so positive in her assurances, that she could not resist. The rooms were fitted up with no attempt at luxury; everything was plain and simple, as far as personal comfort was concerned; but the means of occupa-

tion were numerous, and of a superior order. The workshop was stored with tools and mechanical appliances, and there were some spirited specimens of his wood carving on the walls, besides others half unpacked, which she recognised as coming from Baden-Baden. She recollect—*and it seemed a very long time ago*—how they had stood at the tempting booth for more than an hour on the morning of that sultry day that ended so sadly; and how she had admired these very pieces above the rest; but she did not recollect his buying them then. He must have gone there afterwards,—strange as it seemed that anybody should have cared to buy, or think of such things, during a period that to her was a dream of horror.

“ Does Mr. Clarendon often work like this?” she asked, rousing herself from a reverie with a sense of courtesy towards her civil attendant.

“ He’ll take it up sometimes, ma’am, and go on all day, and half the night, and then not touch it for months. And sometimes, when he has nearly finished a piece, and it don’t quite please him, he’ll send his tool right through it, and throw it into the fire, if there is one, or into a corner of the room. And when I have brought him his coffee in the morning, I have found him, more than once, early as it was, slaving away with no coat on, and his shirt-sleeves rolled up, as if he had not a minute to lose; and it has been all I could do to make him taste a drop before it was cold, though he had been at it, perhaps, already, for a couple of hours or so. Oh dear!—”

This last ejaculation broke from her unawares, at the sight of the farther door, by which this suite of rooms communicated with the grounds, unexpectedly opening, and admitting the master himself, as much surprised at the appearance of his visitors as they were at his. Marion could not help suspecting, by the anxious curtseys, and unintelligible stammering of Mrs. Peters, that she was not quite so confident of her position as she had professed to be; so she hastened to make her own apologies, and cover her from blame. She had been amusing herself

by a tour through the house, and her curiosity had been so much excited by his private door, that Mrs. Peters, like everybody else, had been indulging her fancies—she trusted, without offence. Harcourt's brow cleared the instant she spoke, and he at once gave her a cordial welcome; and while he was seating her in the easiest chair he could find, and producing some of his treasures for her inspection, Mrs. Peters slipped away.

"I am very glad I happened to come back so soon," he said, so heartily that Marion's fears were all dispelled; "two of the men I went to see, failed me, so I found myself free some hours earlier than I expected, and thought I might as well gallop home. Where are all the rest?"

"My aunt is gone among her poor; Miss Porchester went out with your brother, I think; I have not seen them lately."

"So Peters has been forestalling me in showing you over the house. Well, I owe her a good turn for bringing you in here, and she shall have it—on the lathe. A strange fancy, is it not, of mine, to have provided myself with a den, to which, like a sick bear, I can retire and growl in solitude when tired of the outer world? Strange as it may seem to you, I cannot tell you what a boon I have found it at times. You may have discovered that I have sulky fits; I always had from a child; and in those fits nothing ever did me as much good as shutting me up by myself with a box of tools and plenty of wood. Clouds and cobwebs, that would have become storms and steel-traps in contact with other people, vanished under the soothing influence of solitude, and the melody of hammer and nails. It was my father's remedy, and it never failed. When I was a big boy, my dream was of a desert island, not for the sake of unlimited cocoa-nuts, and catching the wild goats by the hair, but purely for the pleasure of being alone. When I found myself my own master, with money to waste if I pleased, I built these rooms on a plan of my own; and when I ensconce myself here, I might be Robinson Crusoe himself, with Peters for my man Friday, or Poll-parrot, which in some

respects she rather more closely resembles. You have no idea how weird and uncanny it is in here, when the outer doors are closed, and I know that no one will come near me for hours ; aye, and know too, that I have vowed to myself not to call in any one, let the horrors come over me as heavily as they would."

" Does that happen to you often ? " asked Marion, compassionately.

" No, very seldom. When it does, I get through a wonderful amount of stiff work. More than one megrim have I chased away with that grindstone. When things get desperate, I take a leaf from Sim Tappertit's book, and grind up all my tools. When my mind, on the other hand, is cool and clear, I go into the next room, and dabble in chemicals, poisons, and such-like innocent toys. I do not know if you have any taste that way."

" I know just enough about them to wish for more. We had a professor who took a good deal of pains with us one term, and I have often wished to see some of his experiments over again, though without the slightest desire to meddle with the materials."

" A very judicious distinction. Well, I can promise you some very pretty little effects whenever you are strong enough to stand some queer smells. Stella detests anything of the sort, and I am afraid to trust Roland, who would blow his head off in five minutes, if he got hold of the apparatus. Do you remember any of these little things ? " showing her the Baden packages. " I came in here now to fetch them for you ladies to inspect in the drawing-room, and choose what you like best. I dare say you know them again."

" Well," said she, in a low voice, for she could not yet allude to the past without emotion.

" I thought I remembered which had pleased you most. It was a pleasure to me to do so."

" It always is a pleasure to you to give to others, I think."

" Not always—not to everybody. To you I would give anything. That reminds me," as if eager to prevent her answer, " that I have something of yours to give you, for

which I have not had an opportunity before." He unlocked a desk, took out a sealed packet, and sat down by her side with a kindness of manner that she felt might have been that of an elder brother.

"When Mr. Saville was taken ill, he had a considerable sum about him, which he gave into my charge, in the presence of Mr. Price, telling me it was money he owed you, and requesting me to put it into your own hands. You will find a memorandum of the amount, according to the rate of exchange, for of course I knew it would be more convenient for you to have it in English money. It is rather over four hundred pounds. He said distinctly, several times, that it was all yours, and that he owed you a great deal more."

She took the packet mechanically, but did not break the seal. "How could he have so much that evening? You do not mean that——?"

She could not frame the question in words: he answered it unspoken.

"Yes, I was mistaken in my first impression. I thought the attack had been brought on by losses, but he had just been winning largely, and after repaying a loan from Lepelletier (there is a memorandum of that also, he made me put it down), he came away with all this about him, feeling, if he stayed a minute longer, he should die at the table. You need have no scruples, as far as the bank is concerned—they had plundered him often enough."

Marion shuddered, and put the packet down as if the touch were loathsome. "What did he mean by owing me money? I do not understand you."

"I am afraid you soon will, Miss Egerton. I am afraid it will prove but too certain that he wronged your trust in him, and that your fortune has suffered in consequence. Hear me out; I will do him this justice at least—it was from himself I had the first hint that it was so; his last thought, his heaviest care in dying, was about you—the wrong he had done you, and the poor return you had had for all your sweetness and dutiful attention. He keenly felt how little he could do for you then, and as I was the only representative of the friends he had

lost, I was the only person to whom he could look to perform his neglected duty. I promised him, if you would let me, to serve you to the utmost of my power. I am agitating you, I fear, and yet there is something more."

He was silent a few minutes; Miss Egerton had leaned her elbow on the table, and kept her face hidden by her hand.

"Can you trust me?" he said, at last, gently possessing himself of the hand that was disengaged.

She turned her eyes on him, full of burning tears. "I can—I do—thoroughly—and oh! if you wish to do me a kindness, keep that miserable money till I ask you for it—till I know what I ought to do with it. I cannot look at, or touch it now; I feel as if it would bring a curse upon me. Thank you, thank you," as he restored it to its hiding-place; "it is a relief to have it out of sight. I feared, I dreaded how it was, too much to ask."

Her sobs almost choked her, the rather that she was endeavouring to keep back the tears that would have poured forth on the slightest relaxation of self-control. He soothed her with kind and considerate words, dwelling with ready tact on such points of Mr. Saville's character as were most pleasing to recall, and making the palliations for his conduct which he had refused to receive himself from others. Her manner told him how she felt all the kindness of this, though her words were few, and he only waited for an opportunity of bringing out the other subject on his mind. Something was said about the accident which had made her so unexpectedly his guest, and she had owned, that in spite of all her regret for the trouble she gave, it had been a pleasure to be actually at Morlands, of which she had heard so much. His face changed a little, and she thought his voice trembled as he asked, "Do you like Morlands, then, as much as you thought you should?"

"I have not been able to judge of the whole, but what I have seen, how can I help admiring?"

"Do you think you could be happy in it?"

"Yes, certainly—that is—I think so—" stammered Marion, too startled to know exactly what she said.

"Even if it were to be your home?"

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Clarendon?" she faltered, with a beating heart.

"Can you not guess what I mean?" and if he had been kind and gentle before, he seemed doubly so now; "will you trust your happiness to me, and let Morlands be your home, as my wife, Marion?"

He had never called her by her name before, and it was with the tenderest respect he did so now, as he held her hand in both his, and would have carried it to his lips, but she drew it from him hastily; and sat looking in his face with a blank wonder, mingled with fear.

"You do not mean it—you cannot mean it," she said, in agitation that almost deprived her of breath; but when she found him, with the same gentle assiduity, renewing the offer, assuring her of his loyal truth in so doing, and pressing for an answer, the emergency restored her presence of mind and nerve.

"Don't, pray don't, Mr. Clarendon," she said, struggling to speak with firmness; "I feel too much to express—I know how grateful I ought to be—but it is impossible, quite, quite impossible. I had no idea of this—I am sorry to give you pain after all your friendship—but what you ask cannot be."

"Why not, Marion?" he said, softly.

She still kept back her tears, though it was all she could do. "Forgive me if I have vexed you, and let me go. I do not feel quite well."

"I have been too hasty; I have overtaxed your strength; I ought to have waited longer; and yet I wished to know my fate. Listen to me, my dear Miss Egerton; it is not without sanction I have presumed like this; in giving yourself to me, you will be fulfilling *his* dying wish. I had his consent in that last interview when he trusted you to my care."

She leaned forward in her chair, clasping her hands tightly together. "He spoke of this—to *you*?"

"Why not? I promised him your happiness should be my first care; trust me, the promise will be kept—it will be my life's endeavour to keep it."

Marion stood up ; her temples were throbbing, and her head began to swim ; he saw she could hardly support herself, and that it would be cruelty to detain her longer. " You shall go and lie down," he said, soothingly, " and give me an answer when you have had time to think it over. Peters shall take you up-stairs." He touched a bell-handle, to which the housekeeper responded almost immediately, and on a sign from her master, who took care to drop a hint that they had been speaking of recent sorrows, by which Miss Egerton had been overcome, conducted her by a private flight of stairs to her own apartment. The gong was sounding for luncheon, but Mrs. Peters advised her to lie down, and keep quiet, and her roast chicken should be brought to her there. Marion roused herself at this, to reject all such offers ; when she felt hungry, she would ask for something ; she was tired now, and would rather be alone ; and in proof of this, bolted the door the moment Mrs. Peters left her. Then she threw herself on her bed, and cried to her heart's content till she fell asleep.

" What ? you are come back, Harcourt ?" was his aunt's greeting, as they met in the dining-room ; " why, you were not expected for some hours at least. I am glad you are here, for Peters has just told me Marion Egerton has the headache, and is gone to lie down, and her aunt is tearing about the village, I suppose, and those wild young madcaps are not come in, and if there is a thing I hate it is sitting down to my meals with no one to speak to. Thank you, I am not hungry ; only just a wing of chicken—you may give me a little of the breast with it, and a slice or two of ham. Thank you. I wish they would come back. I am not at all happy about it, I can tell you ; but of course my opinion goes for nothing."

" Happy about what, aunt ?" asked Harcourt, as he poured her out a glass of wine.

" About Stella going out with those horrid horses again. I said all I could, but you might as well talk to this table as to Stella when she has a whim in her head, and that is the truth. She always said she would do it, and now she has got her own way, I hope she will be happy."

"I hope she will," said he, as he put a morsel of ham into his plate, and made believe to eat it, for good fellowship sake, though any one watching his face might have read that on the brow and lip that boded scant welcome for his cousin's return. Before Mrs. Porchester's anxiety had allowed her quite to finish a sufficiently substantial meal to have passed for a good dinner, that welcome was called for; Roland driving boldly up to the door, and Stella alighting with a smiling face, as if safely returned from an exploit of which she felt deservedly proud. Harcourt gave one look from the window, and walked in the hall to meet them. Even Miss Porchester was a little startled by the stern gravity of his manner.

"John!"

The young groom touched his hat with a faltering hand. "Sir?"

"Go to Mr. Graves as soon as you have taken off your livery, and he will pay you your wages."

"Yes, sir." The lad could hardly get out the words, and as he did so, cast an appealing glance to Roland on the box. He, too, had seen his brother's face, and that his predictions were likely to be more correct than he had any wish they should. He gave the groom a private sign to say nothing then, and drove round to the stables, wishing, with all his heart, that the greys had broken their necks in that storm. Noll was offended, and with good reason, but the poor young fellow must not be the sufferer; he would take the blame, and clear him at once; and with that resolution he hastened back into the house as soon as he was rid of his charge.

Harcourt was performing his duty as carver for his cousin, but with no relaxation of manner; and she, though talking fast and gaily, kept addressing herself to her mother, as if even her courage was more daunted than she liked to own. Roland's entrance gave her more security, and she turned round on her host as he offered her wine, with a smile on whose power she had reason to rely.

"Now, Harcourt, I know we have been very naughty and deserve a great deal of scolding, so pray give it

us as soon as possible, and hear how penitent we are, and then shake hands all round, including poor little John, who was scared out of his wits just now, and no wonder. If you had told me to take my hat off in such a tone, I must have taken off my head too, in my fright. You cannot be so very angry in sober earnest."

" You think not, Stella? I shall be obliged to undeceive you. I have given Graves his orders, and John leaves my house to-night."

" I say, old fellow," put in Roland, after a hasty glance to ensure that no servants were near, " that would be hard measure for a poor lad who only did what he was told. You have better reasons for turning me adrift than poor Jack."

" If you were my servant, I should. John's fault is not in doing what he was told, but what he was told not to do. He knew the consequences, and must abide by them."

" Now, Harcourt, as a favour to me," said Stella, eagerly, " as a proof that you mean to forgive me some day, excuse your man this once for being more gallant than yourself. You could resist my wishes, but John could not, and it would be too bad to visit the sins of the whole party on the poor servant. Mr. Percival would tell you that."

" Mr. Percival would tell you, Stella, that you might have considered the poor servant when you were bent on gratifying your own inclinations at his expense. I am sorry to be obliged to refuse a request of yours, but my word has been passed."

The tone was decisive, and meant to be taken as such: even Stella felt that words would be thrown away. She never realised that Harcourt could hold out against her when she deigned to entreat, and a misgiving for the future seized her for the first time. She finished her luncheon hastily, and retired, without speaking to him again. Roland waited till he had his brother alone, and then began a vehement remonstrance, the more vehement that he knew it was hopeless beforehand. When Harcourt spoke and looked as he did to-day, no argu-

ment could alter his purpose ; but the foreknowledge of what Stella's wilfulness would involve, did not prevent Roland from resenting it keenly, and some passionate exclamations escaped him as he quitted his brother's presence. Stella, who had been waiting to know the result, heard him run up-stairs, and came out of her room to inquire.

" It is just as I told you it would be—you would not believe any one would be as obstinate as yourself," said Roland, " but Harcourt is worse than a woman when he has this mood on. Something must be done for Jack. Where in the world is Mrs. Brudenell ? "

" Not come in yet. Stay, Roland—I know who will give you the best advice. Go and lay the case before Cecil Percival. Tell him the exact truth about me as well as the rest of us, and see what he recommends."

" Well, he may know of another situation for him. I will go and see. Have you seen anything of Miss Egerton all this time ? "

" No. She is lying down—a little tired, Peters says, with going over the house. Roland, your brother can be a terrible despot."

" I am afraid he can. I tell you what, Stella—I am getting tired of this fun, and very little more would make me strike work altogether. I will not be insulted by anybody, not even by him ; and it was very like it to-day."

" He will be gentler in the evening, never fear. It was a great provocation to be beaten, and he must have time to get over it. It will all come right ; do not let John despair ; sooner than he should break his heart, I would engage him myself, if I only knew what to do with him ! "

Percival was not at home, but Roland met him as he was coming back. He listened to the story with deep attention, asking more questions than the narrator thought necessary, as they referred principally to Miss Porchester's habits, feelings, and opinions, which did not exactly affect the present case.

' It is just an instance of the consequence of self-

gratification," was his verdict; "no wonder a generous, candid mind like your cousin's should feel it so painfully. I cannot help you in the matter, except by recommending the lad to my uncle. Send him to me, and I will give him a bed to-night, and a note to the Squire in the morning."

"I think I would rather see your uncle myself. I should like to ask his advice on one or two points."

"Then go to him by all means. His judgment may safely be relied upon when the subject is not ecclesiastical. Indeed, in some things, he is decidedly in advance of his generation."

CHAPTER X.

HARCOURT FINDS HIMSELF MISTAKEN.

THE Vicar returned home the next evening, and when his fly drove up to the gate, his wife was waiting to receive him. This was more than he had been led to expect, as the quick brightening of his countenance plainly showed. It looked fagged enough to require brightening—a London visit in August, on business more or less painful, not being calculated to improve either spirits or health ; but on this his wife made no comment at first, only throwing a little extra briskness into her welcome, and opening the drawing-room door to show him who was waiting to offer hers. Marion was in his arms in a moment, and folded in such a fatherly embrace as she had often longed for in vain.

"I did not expect this pleasure, my love," he said, as soon as he had cleared the huskiness that seized on his voice. "I thought by your last, that our friends would not let our child leave them for a few days longer. Now she is ours, indeed, and we will keep her all to ourselves. Welcome home, Marion ; this is your home, and shall be as happy a one as we can make it. You have had a rough beginning to your English life, but we must hope the smooth is now to have its turn."

Marion answered cheerfully, and by mutual consent, all particulars and matters of business were deferred till after the evening meal, in consideration of the traveller's tired looks. Miss Egerton herself had only been a few hours in the Vicarage, and everything was sufficiently new and strange to supply plenty of safe topics of conversation, till they were seated together in the little drawing-room, as secure from interruption as the "parson" could ever expect to be. Then, by degrees, things began to be told. Marion had been compelled to ensconce herself in a deep arm-chair, with her feet on a stool, and her uncle and aunt, sitting on either side, exchanged glances unperceived, from time to time, over her head. It was as well she did not see how much those glances expressed, for her nerves were still unsteady, and she found it would be much more difficult to say what she had on her mind than she had thought it would be. Alone with her aunt, hiding her face on her shoulder, she could be comparatively bold; but it was another thing to speak to her uncle, in the quiet business-like manner that she supposed he would expect. She did not know, as she turned this over in her mind with her eyes on the floor, how tenderly he was watching her, thinking, if it had pleased Him who could not err, that his own fair-haired daughter would have been just about her age.

"I travelled with one of your Baden acquaintance, Marion," he said, presently, "a Mr. Wray, who has gone on to Morlands with a box of Miss Porchester's. I saw a good deal of him in town; he came over with Mr. John Saville."

Marion looked up, her eyes asking for more information. Her uncle understood the look, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"There is bad news in store for you, my dear, I am afraid. Had you any reason to suspect any mismanagement of your fortune?"

"I was sometimes afraid all was not quite right," she admitted reluctantly; "because we seemed to spend more than I calculated we had."

"Exactly so; that is easily accounted for. You were

spending the capital, not the interest. I find, on applying to Mr. Rolles, your father's lawyer, that three thousand pounds of yours were drawn out soon after you came of age. You remember that, of course?"

"Yes, I did it at Mr. Saville's suggestion, as he wished me to take shares in a French railway, that would give a much higher interest."

"And were they taken?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Saville arranged it all, and I received the interest through his banker."

"Then you have the shares still?"

"I do not know; I never had any papers about them. I do not quite understand what they are, and never could persuade him to explain. He hated talking on business."

"My dear child——" the Vicar paused a moment, and then went steadily on, "he robbed you of it all. If he took any shares, it must have been in his own name, and he parted with them again, and had nearly spent all the money when he died. Your dividends were paid to you out of your capital. The two thousand in the funds are all you have left out of your father's fortune."

The Vicar's wife, who knew every inflexion of his voice, felt her heart throb with pity for the pain he was suffering, and would not have shown her indignation for the world. Marion hid her face in her hands. She was shocked, but not startled; she knew how her mother had been used, and had never felt safe.

"Clarendon gave me a hint of this," said Mr. Brudenell, with a heavy sigh, "but I was slow to believe him."

"He told me something about it, too," said Marion, "and that the thought of me weighed on *his* mind at last. If I had but known, I might have comforted him. Uncle, do not judge him only by this—he was often very kind to me—I shall never forget his coming to fetch me from school, and taking me home."

"He might have done it a little sooner," said Mrs. Brudenell, who could stand anything but hearing George Saville praised. Her husband looked at her, and she fell

to knitting furiously, as her only chance of keeping herself quiet. She need not have feared that he did not sufficiently condemn the conduct of his lost friend; it had stung him to the core, and it was only by speaking of it in that straightforward manner, that he could endure to do it at all. The calmness with which Marion received the news went more to his heart than if she had been overwhelmed with consternation; it showed too plainly what her experience had been.

"Uncle," said she, after a pause, "can I live in England on sixty pounds a year?"

"That must depend on how you live, my dear Marion. Our population would otherwise be rather limited."

"I mean as a gentlewoman?"

"Well, the parson of Auburn, you know, was passing rich on forty—but then he was not a young lady of fashionable habits. I think house-rent and firing, and beef and mutton, would not leave you much for pretty hats and French gloves. Do you think they would, Marion?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Mrs. Brudenell; "she can dress perfectly on sixty pounds a year, and have money in her pocket besides. Marion, my child, don't be running away with wrong notions. You are at home here, and while we have a crust you shall share it; indeed, you will soon have it all to yourself, for we are very old folks, and can hardly mumble it as it is. Now I am going to talk to Jane about some very important matters, so I shall leave you to tell each other all your secrets; only look sharp about it, for I shall be back in half an hour."

She kept her word, and returned at the time specified; asked no questions, though both looked agitated; but kept up a cheerful tone of conversation on general topics, till she could dismiss Marion to bed, with the warning that she was coming up presently with a large basin of arrowroot. "You have seen the picture of the brimstone morning at Dotheboys Hall, have you not? I always administer arrowroot here in that style, with a large wooden spoon, so make up your mind to the worst."

If this had been the first evening of Marion's acquaint-

ance with her aunt, she might have thought such a threat alarming, but she knew well enough that all this assumption of authority only meant that she would be coaxed, and praised over every spoonful, as if the consumption of a given quantity of sustenance were the highest pinnacle of human virtue. The Vicar rose to open the door for her, put his hand on her head as she passed with a whispered blessing, which thrilled her as if it brought back some long-forgotten sound ; then walked slowly to the hearth-rug, and stood musing awhile in silence.

"I must see Harcourt to-morrow," he said at last, "and give him a decided answer. Does Roland know of it?"

"Not that I am aware of. There has been a serious disagreement among the young people. Stella would make Roland drive her out, against Harcourt's orders, and Harcourt punished them by discharging the groom who harnessed the horses. Roland marched off to Mr. Percival of Durningham, and got his promise to take the lad on there, and I suppose asked his advice about government clerkships and Foreign Office appointments, for he came back full of competitive examinations, and in a terrible state of alarm about his English History and arithmetic. If it spirits him up to working for himself, it will so far be a good thing ; meanwhile, they are all glowering at each other at Morlands, and I was glad of a good excuse to bring Marion away. She was quite ill yesterday, and hardly exchanged a dozen words with any of them before we left."

"I cannot understand it," said the Vicar, "but I shall make it my business to find out. She must be protected in future, poor child, as far as possible."

"Yes ; if you had been properly treated, Julian, she would never have been exposed as she has been to such unprincipled robbery. There, I have said it, and cannot take my words back. Do, for once, my dear, use a strong expression or two yourself—for I know you are boiling over with wrath in your heart, and it can do you no good to keep in all the steam."

"I am," he replied, "and therefore I am in no fit state to pass judgment. My love, when you have taken the dear child her arrowroot, I think we will have prayers and go to bed. I have not slept well lately; the heat of London was very great, and I am rather tired."

He might lay his fatigue to whatever he pleased—she knew it was trouble and anxiety that had worn him out, and it required a great effort to join the prayers in the spirit in which he offered them. As she sometimes acknowledged, it was very hard work to be the wife of a man who, under whatever aggravating circumstances, would always be so much better than his neighbours.

A note from Mr. Brudenell brought Harcourt to the Vicarage immediately after breakfast. He was shown into the study, where his old friend was waiting for him alone.

"This is very kind of you, Harcourt," said the latter, holding out his hand as he entered, and offering him a seat; "you will excuse my being anxious to see you as soon as possible."

"I was as anxious as you could be, sir. I have been impatient for your return. We never do so well in your absence, and I am afraid your own expedition has been rather a painful one."

"It has; my fears have been more than realised, and your inferences were correct. There must have been repentance, Clarendon, in that half confession: it would have been as easy to be silent, as to humble himself before you."

Harcourt bowed assent; he was waiting for what should follow.

"I find," Mr. Brudenell continued, after a pause, "that my niece's fortune is very much impaired, and without any prospect of redress. On that point I will not dwell at present. Mr. John Saville is ready to do all that is in his power, and his advice and experience may be of ultimate service to Marion's interests. Your friend, Mr. Wray, has been very useful to him at Baden-Baden, in making all his arrangements. And, Harcourt, I must once more thank you, though you hate thanks, for the

brotherly part you have acted towards her from first to last. It is only what I should have expected from your father's son, but I do not appreciate it the less."

"If you wish to give me a proof of your esteem, sir, you have it now in your power. You are aware of what passed two days ago. I am impatient for an answer, and to be assured I am forgiven for being rather precipitate."

"I have heard what passed; and, Harcourt, I cannot quite understand it."

"It is perfectly simple and straightforward on my part, sir. I do not understand *you*, allow me to say."

"You would marry my niece—that I understand—but do you love her?"

"Such a question from any one else——"

"No one else would have the same right to ask it. Harcourt, there is something at the bottom of this which I do entreat you to explain. Knowing you as I do, it is to me incredible that you should, in so short a time, have formed such an attachment to a girl like Marion, that you would endeavour to hurry her into an engagement—aware, as you must be, what your brother Roland's sentiments are. Passion might have driven you to this, but in that passion I do not believe."

Harcourt shaded his eyes with his hand, and sat still, except a slight movement of his foot on the floor.

"I can find but one reason to account for it, and that is one honourable to your motives, even if mistaken. I would rather leave it to you to confide it to me; you may safely do so; your honour—hers—that of the dead—to whom can they be more precious than to me? If there is anything you can tell me, without breaking a promise, I am sure it is your duty to do it, that I may judge what is right for us all."

"I will tell you then, sir, though I had thought no one should ever know it. You are the only person to whom it could be told, and with you it is sacred. You know how we were all thrown together abroad, and that I had good reason for distrusting Roland's intimacy with Mr. Saville. When I found how his fancy was taken, I did

not know whether it would only be a fancy, or whether he were attached in earnest, and I resolved he should not be drawn suddenly into an engagement. Understand me, I only dreaded Mr. Saville—not Miss Egerton, who struck me from the first as being ingenuous, amiable, and good. I devoted myself to paying her such attentions as were permitted, and the more I conversed with her, the higher opinion I formed of her character, and the lower her step-father fell in my esteem. Things she most innocently let fall told me a great deal more than I expected, and I could foresee nothing but misery to Roland from being connected with such a man. When that attack came on, his own past conduct seemed to rise upon him like a wave of the sea, and most of all, his spoliation of her; and his struggles to redeem the past, as far as words could do, would have gone to your heart—they went to mine. If you had been there, he said, he could have relied on your doing what he could not; but I was the only representative of the friends he had lost, and his only hope therefore was in me. I promised him—how could I help it?—that if he would trust me as he would have trusted my father, I would do my best to act as he would have acted. And then he confided to me, what he said he had only accidentally discovered, that Miss Egerton—that I had troubled her peace—that she had from my manner believed—in short, that my honour was involved, though she had not the remotest idea of her secret being known. There was no time to lose in asking proofs; I promised him her happiness should be my first object, and such a promise I look upon as a vow."

He paused for breath, his voice betraying his inward excitement. The Vicar remaining silent, he continued:

"My first care was to send Roland away; and I was glad of the delay which prevented our following immediately. My resolution was formed, but I could take no steps towards fulfilling it till Miss Egerton recovered. I knew there would be difficulties attending such a step as I have since taken, especially the disappointment to that poor boy, whom nothing has yet undeceived, and who will look upon me as a supplanter; but when I was alone

with your niece, I was carried away by the longing I felt to give her peace, and to assure her of my deep, grateful esteem and regard. Let there be no mistake on this point—in fulfilling my duty, I am providing for my own happiness too—I could never have hoped to win the affection of one so good and pure."

An unusual emotion glistened in his eyes, and Mr. Brudenell could refrain no longer. He stretched out his hand, and pressed Harcourt's in both his.

"I feel your honourable conduct, and I thank you for it, Harcourt. You have done what you thought right, and your conscience will be its own reward. How the mistake arose, we shall perhaps never know, but it is high time you learned the truth—Saville was quite mis-taken."

"How was that possible? What could have misled him?"

"On that point I can tell you nothing; but of this I am quite sure, that Marion is sincere and truthful."

"No one can look at her and doubt it, sir."

"Marion, then, is most anxious that you should not be deceived; and, shrinking from the pain of such an office herself, has left me to give you her answer. With the deepest sense of all your goodness to her, for which she hopes always to consider you her friend, she cannot feel towards you as you deserve that the woman should who is to be your wife. Her agitation alone prevented her making you clearly understand this the other day."

There was a short silence, during which Harcourt walked to the window, and kept his face from his friend. When he spoke, his tone was harsh and abrupt.

"Does she care for Roland?"

"That Roland himself must ascertain, when he feels he has a right to ask. Until he has, I hope he will leave her alone."

"I understand, and I thank you for your openness, sir. I have been a great fool, and have acted like one, and must expect to be so considered. You will tell Mrs. Brudenell, of course, and there, I think, the story had better stop, for it can afford very little satisfaction to

any of us. I have had a dream, and it is over, and I should be glad to think it was forgotten. If there was any double-dealing—if I was gulled at such a moment—”

“Do not think that, Harcourt; spare the dead where it is possible. We know enough without conjecturing.”

“I will spare him before you, at any rate. And now I will go. You will keep my secret; and spare me, in return, as much of your pity for my self-conceit as you can. Every man makes a fool of himself sooner or later, though they do not always see it as plainly as I do. I shall see you again soon—thank you.”

He returned the Vicar's warm pressure with an almost passionate gripe, and hurried out of the house.

How changed the whole world had become to him in a moment! And why? When he first learned what Mr. Saville told him, it had been with pain; it was unlike what he had imagined of Marion Egerton, and the difficulties of which he spoke were by no means easy to face. But gradually, as he realised that his honour was engaged, the idea of being loved had grown sweet to him—he had felt a right of possession in the fair young charge who relied on his protection so gratefully; and was jealous, though he hardly knew it, of her being served by any one else. If it soothed his pride to reflect that she was worshipping him, with very little prospect of her worship being appreciated, it gratified his generosity to think, also, he had the means of gladdening her orphan heart by a tender word; and the poorer she could prove to be, the more delight he should feel in making her rich. All this was not love, but it had drawn him on much further than he knew; she had become dearer to him than he was at all aware of, and the certainty that he had been mistaken, no matter how that mistake had been brought about, left a blank for which he was quite unprepared. The mortification of having made the mistake—of having thought himself beloved, when another was, in all probability, preferred, made the blood tingle in his veins as he strode along; and the really generous feelings that had actuated so much of his conduct towards Marion Egerton

having been thus ill-requited, gave place to a sense of resentment, not the less bitter for being unreasonable.

He had looked upon her as his own, and by so doing had brought himself to dwell with pleasure on a future passed with one so devoted and gentle, whose tenderness would compensate for the loss of the regard he risked for her sake. That he was perilling his brother's love—laying himself open to the charge of secretly supplanting him, and betraying his confidence, he had painfully felt from the first, and many a hasty speech that had grated on Roland's feelings had been caused, in part, by this unavowed compunction. And it had all been a delusion; Roland was most probably preferred to himself, and some day they would discover what he had imagined, and laugh over it at his expense. Well, let them laugh—he had done his part—he had kept his word to old Saville, swindler as he was, and it was fortunate he had passed the age in which the experiment might have endangered his own peace. He was not in love, nor likely to be, and he was a free man once more; his duty was done, and his conscience clear, and he could now pay attention where it was due, to those he had comparatively neglected. He had certainly been rather remiss to his aunt, and would at once begin to make her the proper amends. Stella too—he had postponed thinking of her to the last—but now the image of her beauty rose alluringly before him, soothing his wounded pride with the reflection that all hearts were not so thankless as Marion Egerton's. How cold he had been to her lately—how needlessly severe upon her wilfulness—giving her reason to think herself almost unwelcome, and certainly slighted; and all the while she had never shown any ill-will towards the invalid guest, but had nursed her so kindly, and treated her as a friend. What would she think of him if she knew what had passed? He had never exchanged a word with her that could in any way commit either of them, and yet he was as conscious as she was of what everybody, herself included, took almost as a matter of course.

As often happens, at the moment that he was thinking

of her, and trying so to think that he might shut out the recollection of Marion, he saw her coming across the park to meet him, with Roland on one side and Percival on the other. He watched her approach, and said to himself how much he admired her, and how superior she was in style and fashion to most women of his acquaintance, and if she had her faults, like others, they were those of her education and circumstances, such as kind, judicious management would soon lead her to overcome. Either he was mistaken, or else her countenance wore a more engaging expression than had been usual of late: yes, it certainly was so, for here she was coming up to him with a smile, and an outstretched hand, which it was impossible not to receive as cordially as it was given.

"Dear Harcourt, let us be friends again! I ask your pardon before these two witnesses, both of whom take your part against me in the most uncivil manner, and tell me I have behaved abominably, as, no doubt, I have. It would be too much to expect me to profess to be sorry, but it will be very generous to treat me as if I were, in hopes that I may in time."

"You disarm anger by such penitence," said her cousin, laughing, and drawing her arm in his in token of amity. "I might have known, while you were in the house, I should have nothing to call positively my own, not even my ill-temper. I give it up to you to do what you please with; it has been no good to me."

"Then if you forgive the guilty, of course you will the innocent. My soul yearns upon the banished Rinaldo. Let John return to his empty saddle, or his pale, reproachful looks will haunt me at the festive board."

"There I cannot oblige you, for Rinaldo's saddle is filled already. I have promoted your gallant preserver to the vacancy. I pay you the compliment of considering that service deserving of lasting reward."

"You have made a groom of Claude Melnotte? Can he ride?"

"Yes; where he learned does not transpire, but I conclude it was at some itinerant Astley's. I only hope

he will not think it necessary to perform any graces of the circus when riding behind me."

"Upon my word, it would be worthy of Punch. I will draw the design myself. 'Mr. Nokes, wishing to secure a groom who has a practical knowledge of horses, hires a rider from a circus. Sensation in Rotten Row, when his new retainer, in a fit of absence, stands on one leg on his horse's back.' I can see the whole picture—the ladies' horses taking fright, the gentlemen, lounging against the rails, putting up their eye-glasses—small boys jeering, and little dogs on their hind legs with astonishment. I really think the idea ought to bring me five pounds."

"It shall, if you will execute the drawing."

"You are in earnest? Done, then, only it is not begun, and I have not the bold touch of Claude Melnotte Trelawny, whose horses are the most delicious specimens I ever saw out of a Noah's ark. If I only dared, I would sketch him as he sat just now, contemplating his performances, all of a row, with a serene satisfaction, only to be equalled by that of Jones, when she has been an hour and a half over my hair, and releases me with a gracious 'There, ma'am!' I have quarrelled with Jones, too, you will be sorry to hear; and she is not so easily appeased as you are. You only held out two days, but she will not forgive me under a week, and by that time we shall be a long way off."

"Where are you going?"

"Home—if that may be called by a name implying rest and peace which really means confusion and trouble. You saw mamma had a letter on business this morning?"

"Yes, but as it was no business of mine, I did not ask impertinent questions."

"She could not have answered them if you had, for, like a sensible woman, she never reads such letters without my help. If she did, she would infallibly be ruined in six months, for she never understands what is told her, and is always in a hurry to write by return of post, for fear there should be some mistake. There, do not pretend to look so disapproving; I am very naughty, but

I cannot be penitent twice in one day, so you must let that pass. The plain truth is, our house at G—— is to be sold over our heads, and we are to decamp on very short notice, as it is to be pulled down for the sake of sundry local improvements, on which they have not consulted *me*. Now, there are a great many things we have to arrange and look after, before such a grand move; and the sooner we get back, the better. Where we are to find another house within our means, I do not exactly know."

"Then I do. I have one to let at this moment, and a great nuisance it has been to me this summer, for I had to put it in repair, and paper and paint it from top to bottom, for a tenant who never came after all. It is the other side of the park; will you come and see it? Roland, would not the White House do for them?"

"I never thought of it; of course, it is the very thing," said Roland, "only it is a good step from the church. You will have to be lively in the morning, Stella. You know the house, Percival—that one you were wishing to turn into a sanatorium the other day."

"Then I am afraid we shall be disappointing Mr. Percival," said Stella, with a momentary glance into the curate's eyes, now sparkling with eagerness and hope. He stammered something, which nobody heard, but which she well understood; and was as impatient as either of the party to go and examine the proposed tenement immediately. As Roland said, it was some way from the church, especially by the road, but there was a shorter cut through the park, by which they now went, and which would be available to the tenants. The house was small, standing in a tolerable garden, with accommodation quite sufficient for Mrs. Porchester's household, with a spare room when required. It was unfurnished, but Stella decided that the furniture from their present abode would suit the size of the apartments; she was in a mood to be satisfied with everything; to approve paper and prospect, aspect and situation; to agree to suggested arrangements, and to defer, with meekness unwonted, to the landlord's opinions touching

flower-beds and kitchen garden. Everything, indeed, as she said, seemed to suit their wants so well, she was sure there must be some great drawback that had not occurred to them yet.

"What drawback can there be," said Harcourt, "if you really like to come? Here is the house, and it is yours this moment if you will take it. You are doing me a service, not accepting a favour."

"I wish I could be sure of that, and I would close with your offer directly. I never do anything so thoroughly to my mind as when I do it in a hurry. You really are not afraid to have us for your neighbours?"

"Well, it is a serious consideration, but anything will be a boon that keeps away Percival's hospital. You are a degree better than scarlet fever, and not quite so alarming as small-pox."

"That is something, at any rate. And if we do not pay our rent, shall you seize our goods?"

"Or on something more precious still," was his reply; and though it was spoken in jest, it brought a flush of gratified pride to her cheeks, unobserved by Percival, who was just then absorbed in proving to the old woman who kept the house, that nothing could be easier than to get to church every Sunday, at least. He had proved it clearly, convincingly, several times already, but the result had been the same as if it had not been proved at all; and while Roland stood by, listening to the argument, the cousins stepped out into the garden. Stella took the opportunity of this amicable state of things to introduce a subject of some interest—their mutual friend, Gervase Wray. Did Harcourt know how distressed the poor fellow was for money? Ah, he was shy of naming it, perhaps, because he had been so foolish. Yes, exactly—he had been made to play—not at the tables, there he might have had a chance; it was with a party of gay friends, whom he met at Baden, some of them Russians, and they all played high, and much better than poor Gervase, and he could not be left out, and, in fact, they fleeced him completely. He had to borrow of several other acquaintances, and, among them, of Mr. John Saville, to cover the expenses of his stay.

" Borrow of Mr. John Saville, when I supplied him with enough to keep him there three months ! Too bad, upon my honour. He must get out of the scrape as he can ; I will have nothing to do with it."

" Yes you will, my dear cousin, because I ask it as a great favour. We shall want his help presently in all manner of ways. Mamma is never so happy in her mind as when he is by to look after her boxes and bags; and he brought my lost property safely all the way from Baden, when you, and Louis, and Jones, among you, contrived to leave it behind. Really, sooner than he should look as miserable as he does now, we must let him have the money ourselves, and in that case, I don't know how your rent is to be paid. Come, lend it to me, if not to him, and I will repay you by instalments, out of the produce of our garden. I have grand ideas on the subject of apples and pears, not to say hairy gooseberries, with which I mean to realise boundless wealth, to the amazement of Stourbrooke, and utter annihilation of Morlands."

" And on the security of your hairy gooseberries I am to pay Gervase Wray's gambling debts ? How could he be such an idiot, after all my warnings ?"

" How could you be such an innocent—to use a milder term—as to warn him at all ? Have you studied man's nature to so little purpose as not to know that a forbidden pleasure is always the most irresistible ?"

" I thought that temptation was peculiar to women. Witness my greys !"

" Now, that is being really ungenerous, to reproach such a penitent as I am with the very crime you have forgiven. Poor Gervase ! he is much more amiable than you are ; everybody imposes on his good nature. He did not tell you, I suppose, how he was worried by poor Mr. Saville's valet, Auguste ?"

" No ; what had he to worry him about ?"

" Oh, I don't know, but he did, and hinted at all sorts of things which had come to his knowledge, secrets of his master's, who, by his account, told him everything ; and on whom he seems to have played the spy occasionally—especially in his last moments ?"

" Does Gervase say so ?" asked Harcourt, in an altered voice.

" Gervase did not say whether he believed him or not, but I understood the man professed to know more than any one supposed, and wanted to get hold of poor Marion Egerton, to make money out of her by imparting his knowledge ?"

" How did Gervase quiet him ?"

" By a douceur, I believe, and by getting him another situation. Captain Sinclair hired him as his valet, and has kindly taken him to Rome. He will not come, therefore, in Marion's way, and I sincerely trust that the Fates and the Captain will keep him out of that of Jones."

" They are great allies, are they ?"

" I am afraid there is an *entente cordiale* between the nations, and that the wealth being on the side of Britannia, the constancy will be on that of Gaul. I am not quite on such hostile terms with Jones as to wish her a husband who would play eavesdropper to his master's dying words."

" Does he pretend to have done so ?" asked Harcourt, with assumed indifference, " because, if he does, I hope Gervase bought his discretion cheap. No one could have overheard the poor man when he was speaking to me, and he spoke to no one else. I will set Wray's mind at rest on that point ; and Stella, to ease yours, and keep my word besides, to him and all of you, the greys are going off to be sold to-morrow, and whatever they fetch shall be at your disposal. Are you contented now ?"

She could not well be otherwise, having gained all for which she really cared ; but Roland, when she told him what had passed, was not so well pleased.

" I am glad you two have made it up," he said, " but Jack has lost his place, and I shall resign mine before I lose it too. So long as I was in authority here it was all right ; if I am nobody, the sooner I move on the better." And the purpose that had been gradually forming in his mind for some time past began to assume a firmness it never lost again. It was further strengthened by the arrival of a visitor, who walked in just before

luncheon, while the young people were in the midst of plans and measurements, debating on the prices of carpets and the capacities of bedrooms, and paying but scant attention to the flow of grievances kept up as an accompaniment by Mrs. Porchester. The visitor in question was Mr. Percival of Durningham, and as his visits were rare, he was received with a warm and respectful welcome. He had already ridden over once to leave a card on the ladies, but had not found them at home. This time he wished to be admitted, so came at a favourable hour.

"*You* here, Cecil?" he exclaimed, when he had time to observe that his nephew was of the party; "I did not expect to find you at leisure so early. But I can guess the reason. I see what you are all about—this boy has bullied you into carrying out one of his wild schemes, and Harcourt and Roland are going to set up a Home for the Destitute close to their park. Am I right, Miss Porchester?"

"Quite right, sir," said she, demurely.

"And Cecil here is to be chaplain and spiritual director?"

"If he will undertake so troublesome a charge."

"Troublesome! the more plague he has, the better he likes you; and only give him a fair excuse for robbing his neighbours, and he will be delighted., I am glad it is not in my village, that is all; though I know it will cost me something as it is."

"How much can you spare in a case of great necessity, sir?"

"That depends on who asks me, and how I am asked. Why, what is the matter? You all look brimful of some fun or other, at my expense, no doubt. Mrs. Porchester, they are quizzing me sadly among them—will you explain what the good joke is?"

"Indeed, it is no joke at all, none in the least, Mr. Percival, for me to be obliged to move at such short notice, and pack up everything, and see to every single thing myself, for Stella never will take any trouble, and Harcourt is very obliging, I am sure, to offer us his empty house, and nothing can be more agreeable than

to be settled close to him and Roland, nothing—only I always did say I never would live in the country, especially in the winter, and a lonely house in a garden is the dreariest, most dismal place in the world. But I am an old woman, and think very little of my own comforts, and if the young people are satisfied, it will do very well, I dare say, and we shall always be happy to see you, or your nephew, or any friend who is kind enough to come and call, as indeed will be a charity, if we really do take the house."

Half way through this speech, the good Squire had solved the riddle, and was smiling good humouredly at his mistake. It led to much gay banter between him and Stella, whom he admired considerably; and for a time he seemed to have forgotten the real object of his visit. However, on something being said about the next day's sport, he exclaimed, "Ah, that reminds me—I knew I should catch neither of you boys to-morrow, and I want to know a little more about that lad Roland mentioned. You have decided to part with him, Clarendon?"

"I have parted with him."

"Where is he, then?"

"Percival knows best."

"He is at my lodgings," said Cecil. "I found him something to do."

"That I'll be bound you did. And you will not take him back, Harcourt?"

"I never take back a servant. It is a bad plan."

"Very bad, and therefore, I suppose, I often do it. You give him a fair character?"

"A good, honest, well-principled lad," said Cecil.

"I beg your pardon, Cecil, but I was inquiring of his master, not of his priest. You cannot know much about him, I imagine."

"He was brought up in Mr. Brudenell's school, and he has a good opinion of him."

"That is quite another thing, and if Harcourt confirms the opinion, I have nothing more to desire."

"I have no fault to find with him whatever," said Harcourt.

"Then why send him off?"

"Because I said I would if he disobeyed me."

"And you call disobedience no fault?"

"No—if it had been a fault, I might have overlooked it."

"Oh, you are too paradoxical for me, by half. I shall only ask one more question—is it true that you have got that fellow Trail hanging about your premises still?"

"Trail's productions are hanging about, at any rate, and marvellous specimens they are. You Durningham Florentines drove your genius into exile, and Stourbrooke will go down to posterity as his refuge. He has been painting my horses, and now he is going to ride them, *vise* John, promoted for breach of discipline. It is only an exchange between the parishes."

"A good one for us," quoth the Squire, "if we lose a drunken vagabond, and gain a decent, steady servant. You give new lamps for old ones with a vengeance. What are we to have in exchange for Cecil, by the way?"

"Ah, sir, we have neither lamp nor luminary to offer in return for such a shining light as his."

"Very true," put in Roland, emphatically. "We have nothing half as good."

Cecil bit his lip, and muttering something about engagements, was beginning to take his leave. Stella caught his eye, and he came up to her for a few last words, and the gong sounding before they were finished, she took his arm as a matter of course, and once in the dining-room, it was too late to talk of going away. The Squire had ceased to think of him, or of her; he was come over to talk about Roland's projects, and detained the brothers awhile, when the rest went into luncheon, that he might, as he said, be sure what he was about.

"It is your wish, Roland, to be doing something, is it not?"

Roland assented.

"And yours, Harcourt, that he should do it?"

"Since he wishes it," was Harcourt's reply. It was

the first time he had actually given consent, and his brother did not quite understand the tone of the answer. The Squire, however, was satisfied.

"Then we understand each other, and the question only is, how to set about getting what you want. A Government appointment, you say—but Government appointments are not to be had every day in the week, and you must know something of the work you will have to do. My interest is good; my old friend, Sir Perkin Soames, will do anything he can, and Harcourt, you should stir up your mother's cousin, General Alexander. Between those two, the boy will be pushed into something, if he can only pass in the examinations. They used to have no such doings in my day, but I have lived to see we were not always right, and it is a shame for a youngster to draw a salary who cannot cast up a sum. How are you off for history and geography, and all that sort of thing, Roland?—for I know young fellows who came to horrible grief over questions in the Peninsular War, and Central Africa; didn't know who won the battle of Salamanca, and fancied Dr. Livingstone was gone to the diggings. Between ourselves, though Sir Perkin won't own it, there is a vast deal of humbug in those questions; and I do not believe the examiners are so very much wiser than the wretched young men they puzzle; but it will never do to go up and be beaten. If you try, you must get up your books a bit first, and be coached by some sharp tutor in town."

Roland agreed to it all, and Harcourt was struck, in turn, by the unusual gravity of his manner. He was generally so impetuous in every scheme, it seemed unnatural that this, of such serious importance to his prospects, should be discussed by him so calmly. Neither could quite comprehend the other, and both were too proud to seek an explanation; so the conference went amicably on, without any of the Squire's advice being rejected—a fact that raised them both considerably in his good opinion.

And all the while there was a whisper going on in the elder brother's ear, whose voice he could not still: "Send

him away—send him away ! Give him all the help, all the encouragement you can ; pay him handsomely to go, if necessary ; but keep him from Stourbrooke while *she* is here—or she is lost to you for ever !”

CHAPTER XI.

HOW ROLAND DID WHAT ENGLAND EXPECTED.

SEPTEMBER came and went, and the partridges received their due attention, and October had brought the same respectful notice on the pheasants, when Roland bade adieu to his home, and went up to town to prepare for his examination. Gervase Wray was in London now, and they were to be together for the present, while the candidate for official honours was studying that formidable Modern History, which appalled him the more he looked at it. What to him were the Pragmatic Sanction, or the Thirty Years’ War, that he must give them the time and attention which he could devote so much more agreeably, if not profitably, elsewhere ? How maddening it was to be told by those who had *not* passed, that you never, by any chance, were asked questions on the subjects you got up best—that the examiners were always hunting out old things from Annual Registers, that nobody but the Annual Registrar, whoever he might be, ever thought worth remembering—and that the marks you got did not depend on your real capacity (this seemed the crowning aggravation of all), but on the peculiar notions of your judge on sundry points—notions which you had no possibility of getting at beforehand. Over and over again he despaired of success in learning and remembering everything that had ever happened in the world ; and as often, after some tremendous walk, returned to the undertaking in perfect good faith, that as it was expected of him, he must somehow manage to do it. He was working as he had never worked in his life, for it was with a glad hope before him ; and if Marion’s eyes would sometimes look out of his page rather too brightly for serious

reading, they shone no less through the clouds of disgust and weariness, to cheer him on with the vision of a happy future, when history and geography might be as if they had never been.

He had kept his resolution bravely, and though he had often been at the Vicarage, and a friendly intercourse had been carefully maintained between the houses, he had never told his love to Marion in words. If his looks and manner betrayed it, so much the better ; he was not going to act a part to please anybody, and nobody thought of expecting that he should. They met, not so often as he could have wished, but often enough to make them both very happy, and cause the blank of his departure to be sensibly felt. She understood why he was going, and what he hoped for, and she encouraged him by all the means in her power ; but she missed him grievously, and thought the time would never come to an end. Fortunately, perhaps, that autumn was a sickly one in Stourbrooke, and there was so much illness and distress among the villagers, that even Mrs. Brudenell's care for her niece's newly recovered strength gave way before the urgencies of duty, and Marion took her first lesson in parochial usefulness among the beds of the sick and dying. There was work enough to employ every available hand, and she made a much more rapid progress under the pressure of necessity, than if there had been time for her to think whether she were doing everything well or badly. Her health improved instead of suffering from the unwonted exertion ; her colour and bloom returned as she accompanied her aunt, in the darkening afternoons, to outlying cottages, where a nurse could not be had for love or money, and where, while Mrs. Brudenell attended to the invalids, she put her hand to all manner of domestic tasks—the more readily for her continental training. Many a little service was she enabled to render, from having been allowed, during her late sojourn at the *pension*, to beguile some of the hours in helping the good old *bonne* :—accomplishments of which Mr. Saville had more than once reaped the benefit, though without investigating their origin. It charmed

Mrs. Brudenell to find her niece so ready with her hands ; and though their ideas on sick cookery differed in some essentials, she could bear to be opposed by Marion, if by nobody else, and was brought to admit that some of the *bonne's* recipes were not without merit, though she believed a good sensible mutton-chop was worth them all.

On these expeditions they constantly met Cecil Percival, who gave himself no rest night or day. It did not quite agree with him as with Miss Egerton ; for he was one who needed rest, and looked as if he were burnt up with fever ; but no persuasion would make him call in Dr. Wartop, and the latter was too full of work to press his services. The state of the place delayed the proposed arrangements at the White House. Not even Stella's authority could have made Mrs. Porchester risk herself where there was danger of infection ; and Stella herself was daunted by the accounts she heard. So they agreed, for once, on paying visits in the interval, and deferring their final move till the epidemic was past.

Harcourt gave liberally, paid all expenses required of him, refused nothing in the way of repairs, drainage, and other sanitary measures, and was generous in remission of rent where payment was impossible. But he avoided the dying, and seemed painfully depressed when any such cases were forced on his notice. His housekeeper told Mrs. Brudenell he was falling into his gloomy habits again, and shutting himself up in his private apartments ; and she did think it so bad for so young a gentleman, she hoped the ladies would persuade him out of it. And as nothing had ever passed, since his rejection, to make Marion uncomfortable in his presence, beyond the regret of having given him pain, he was asked to the Vicarage, and pressed to come often, and so kindly received when he did come, that he came nearly every day.

They thought no harm, for the Vicar and his wife believed his offer had only originated in honourable generosity, and, while they respected him for it, had no idea his heart had been touched ; and if Marion judged otherwise, she imagined him perfectly cured. She knew he had been the first to urge his cousin to settle near him,

and that, she said to herself, he never would have done, had he meant to trifle with her regard. His coming in this way was just what she could have wished, enabling her to treat him, without fear of misconstruction, as so generous a friend deserved. And so he saw her daily, and under all circumstances ; and she lost all fear and restraint in his presence, and talked to him freely, and listened to him with interest, as a brother—dear for his own sake, dearer still for Roland's. And the oftener they met, the more plainly he discovered that she was becoming dearer to him than life, than brotherhood, than honour. He could not love a little—in his nature a sentiment became a passion ; and passion, where the soul has virtually cast off the only government that can hold it back, or keep it down, too surely becomes master of all. He shuddered as he read his own heart ; he would hurry home after a cheerful half-hour, sometimes the most they could spare him, to stifle thought by occupation, going over the White House, lavishing expense upon Stella's favourite improvements, or writing encouraging letters to Roland, with offers of supplies—as if thereby to atone to both. Roland, however, was in a very economical mood at present ; would only accept a moderate allowance, declined horse or servant, and resisted all temptations to needless expenditure. He could be firm, too, when his mettle was roused ; and from the day that Harcourt sold the greys, he had resolved to cost him as little as he could help. If he sometimes sighed, on a warm, foggy morning, to think what a hunting day it must be in the country, his regret did not damp his industry, which, as the time drew near, became more ambitious than ever. He refused all invitations, resisted seductive play-bills and opera-tickets, and lived in an atmosphere of Modern History, that drove Gervase Wray nearly wild. He was thankful when a pressing invitation to meet Mrs. Porchester at the house of a mutual friend, gave him a fair excuse for leaving the student to fight his battles alone, as even his tried good humour gave way beneath the infliction of being pelted with miscellaneous historical questions at every meal. He went to meet Mrs. Porchester,

and take her orders for the move to the White House, and Roland, to the great joy of his half-maddened tutor, went up for his examination, and, in due course, passed—a feat which amazed himself, and excited some disgust in those he had beaten, who murmured at the injustice of being pitted against Oxford men. By this great victory, he was admitted to the dignity of a clerk in her Majesty's — Office, with a salary, about two-thirds less than what he spent as pocket-money, and the prospect of rising by degrees for the remainder of his days. Sir Perkin, the head of that department, to whom he announced his success, wished him joy, told him his fortune was made, invited him to dinner, and promised him early leave of absence to go down and see his brother. The sound of leave of absence had an official ring about it that charmed Roland's ears, accustomed as he was to go and come as he pleased, without any leave but his own; and he trod the pavement, after quitting the presence, with a consciousness of having done what England expected him to do, and a strong sense of what she might be expected to do for him in return.

He was dressing in haste for Sir Perkin's dinner-party, when Wray's servant came in to announce that a Frenchman, giving the name of Auguste, had called several times to see his master, and would Mr. Clarendon be so good as to tell him when he might be expected to return?"

"Auguste? Ask him if he was Mr. Saville's valet at Baden. What on earth can have brought him here?" he said to himself, as he went on brushing vigorously at his luxuriant locks. "Ah! come in, Auguste! Glad to see you, though in this darkness it sounds rather like an empty compliment. Bring in another candle, Timbs, and stick it into Mr. Wray's account. Not exactly the skies of Baden or Switzerland, Auguste? I thought you were basking in the sunshine of Rome all this time."

"Sare, I did go to Rome; Monsieur Wray he was so kind to recommend me to one gentleman, and did go wiz him, but he was not the gentleman I was used to serve—he did not know how to treat his valet-de-chambre as I had been treated, and I left him, and came to London to

make my fortune, sare, you know. It is not to be made by standing still in ze fog—everyzing in London so dear, so dear!”—he held up both his hands—“you pay for ze air you breathe, and you get no air but coal smoke. Ah! what a climate! Monsieur Wray, will he soon be in town again?”

“I expect him any day; he is enjoying himself in the country, and if he is wise he will stay there, where I should be, but for my duty. It is new for me to be in London in the hunting season, Auguste,” he went on, as he put the finishing touches to his toilette, “but you must know I am now a Government official, a servant of her Majesty’s. I have just passed, and a very stiff examination too,” dwelling on the phrase with great relish. “We are rather particular now about the kind of men we put into office, and a certain amount of talent and knowledge is required, which all men have not the means of possessing. Even *I* had to buckle to, I can tell you; and Mr. Wray had enough of it, poor man, and was glad to get out of hearing. You see, I want to make my fortune as well as you, so I am working hard for it. Halloo! it is time I was off. Run for a cab, Timbs, there’s a good fellow; I must not go in to dinner smelling of this fog. What can I do for you, Auguste? It is a bad business for you to be out of place.”

“If you could recommend me to any gentleman who wanted a first-rate valet, or any family who required a confidential man-servant to go abroad, Mr. Roland. Zere is my address, my *logement* at present. Ah! such a *logement* for such a price! Zey are zieves, ze London *propriétaires*, and zer wives are worse. Zey take all your money, and your coals, and your *café*, and your little property, and zey abuse you to your face. Ah!”

“Then if I hear of anything I may let you know. All right; help me on with that great-coat—thank you. If I were a rich man, I would engage you myself.”

“Ah, if I could meet with one master like you, M. Roland, or *M. votre frère*, I would die content. Can you tell me, sare, any news of Mademoiselle? She is not married yet—no?”

"Not that I am aware of," said Roland, smoothing his hat.

"Ah no—not till ze *deuil* is over, assuredly. But after zat, it will be soon, hein?"

"That is more than I can tell you, Auguste. Have you any special interest in the matter?"

The man's small black eyes twinkled eagerly. "Interest, yes—Mademoiselle is just—she is true—she is generous—she will do what is right when she is rich. I have no fear."

"Nor I, but I doubt her being rich in a hurry—if you are talking of Miss Egerton?"

"Ah, sare, I understand—she has had great wrong too. I know, I know"—striking his breast, and shaking his head; "but it is not for me to speak of her affairs. When she is rich, she will remember me. And Mademoiselle *votre cousine, la plus belle des belles*, as poor Monsieur called her, she is well?"

"I hope so. Mr. Wray is gone to meet her and my aunt, and arrange about their coming to live near us in the country. Now really, my good fellow, I must go, or I shall be late, and to be too late at the house of the Head of my Department would indeed be a breach of manners. Come and see me to-morrow morning if you like, and we will see what can be done for you.—What did he mean by talking of Marion's marriage, and of what she would do when she grew rich, I wonder?" thought he, as he drove along. "Like the impudence of those foreign flunkies, to talk about her at all. Heigh-ho! How long shall I be climbing to the top of this official tree? It seems a year since I saw her, and I am still only scrambling at the lower branches. How I wish I knew what she is doing at this moment!"

The party was a well-selected one, and Roland received a gratifying welcome. His mother's kinsman, General Alexander, was one of the guests, as well as his daughter, a young widow lady, whom Roland had not seen since he was a schoolboy, but who at once claimed his acquaintance, and contrived to sit next to him at dinner. His left-hand neighbour was a rather shy young maiden.

making her first appearance in public, and decidedly preferring *her* left-hand supporter, whom she knew well, to the tall cavalier she had never met before ; so he had less scruple in allowing Mrs. Lyndsay to absorb his attention. She had travelled, and seen a great deal of society, and knew something about everybody ; and a more agreeable companion at a dinner-table could not well have been found, especially as she seemed determined he should be agreeable too. Everybody knows how delightful that person is who draws you skilfully out, and causes you to appear to advantage—and Mrs. Lyndsay was known in the world as a most delightful woman.

She had been abroad the greater part of the year, intending to winter in Rome, but had been recalled from the latter place by her father's state of health. He had complained of loneliness, and she had come back to cheer his winter evenings.

“ No persuasion will make him give up office, though I know it will end in his breaking down altogether, so all I can do is to help the harness to sit as lightly as possible. If I had my own way, I would take it off altogether.”

“ I am very glad you have not. Here am I, just beginning to climb, and wanting every friendly hand I can lay hold of, and you are trying to rob me of my chief supports. The country cannot spare General Alexander, and the country, you know, is above everything.”

“ Oh yes, we know all about that ; your country means your salaries, and so long as those are regularly paid, you care for little else. I have not congratulated you yet on your blushing honours. I hope to live to see you Secretary of State, and as hard to persuade into a holiday as you are now eager to get it. And when may I congratulate you on another score ?”

“ On what ?” asked he, with an unreasonable idea that she might have heard of his attachment.

“ On your brother's engagement ; or is it still to be kept a secret ? I heard it talked of in Rome as a settled thing.”

“ The Romans are wiser than I, then. Who may the

lady be? for I know he has been given to a great many."

"Of course he has; he must pay the penalty of being so hard to please. Any conscientious person in his place would have married long ago. We were all certain, at one time, that Stella Porchester would conquer the obdurate heart, but she has so many admirers, I suppose she has no leisure for fixing one."

"She is coming to live close to us," began Roland, perplexed by these remarks; "my aunt has taken a house of Harcourt's, and we expect them to take possession by Christmas."

"Ah, indeed! you surprise me. And the wedding? Come, with kith and kin you need not be so extremely close. You have been studying official reticence so perseveringly, that you cannot shake it off in social intercourse."

"I am not close, but dull, I am afraid, for I really do not know what you mean."

"I see you look mystified. Is it possible I am mistaken? I heard a most romantic story about the sudden death of a gentleman at Baden, who committed his daughter to your brother's care on his death-bed, and whom Harcourt was engaged to marry. I cannot recall the name at this moment, but my opposite neighbour will, for he knew something of him. Sir Henry!" addressing an elderly man at the other side of the table, decorated with one or two foreign orders, "what was the name of the gentleman we heard of, who died so suddenly at Baden-Baden this summer?"

"Do you mean poor George Saville?"

"Yes, thank you. Oh, and now I remember the facts; the young lady was his step-daughter, and as my story went, deeply attached to your brother; they had been wandering through Switzerland together. Come, you cannot plead ignorance now."

"Not as to the parties, certainly, for I was there at the time; but I believe you are mistaken as to the facts, as I rather think I should have known if such had been the case. Miss Egerton came over to England with our party,

and is living with her uncle and aunt in our village, but beyond that, the romance is due to the imagination of your informant."

"Who could have told me? Stay, I will try and recollect. I heard it at Mrs. Marchmont's, in Rome, and I believe she said it came to her from the Sinclairs. Captain Sinclair afterwards talked about it himself. He was at Baden just after you all left, and met a friend of yours there, Gervase Wray. Everybody knows poor Gervase; I thought we should have seen him to-night."

"He is out of town. Pray go on."

"I have interested your incredulous ears, have I? Well, Captain Sinclair ought to know something of the business, for he hired Mr. Saville's valet on Gervase Wray's recommendation, and, ignominious as it may seem, I imagine the story came originally from him."

The room swam before Roland's eyes, the lights grew misty, and the voices sounded far off. In his confusion, he was awkward for the first time in his life, and broke a champagne glass over the delicate silk of his younger neighbour. The temporary disturbance thus caused, and the necessity of making atonement by apology and assiduous attention, fortunately prevented his betraying himself; and by the time he could turn again to Mrs. Lyndsay, she seemed to have forgotten their previous topic.

When the ladies left the dining-room, Roland placed himself near Sir Henry Mayne, and after the first glass of wine had been taken, brought on the subject of Mr. Saville. He found he had lighted on no sorrowing friend, like Mr. Brudenell, to whom every remembrance of that wasted life was a pain and a grief; Sir Henry knew Mr. Saville as others knew him—as the hero of many a good story, the point whereof lay in his accomplished roguery.

"Sinclair knows a good deal about him," he continued, peeling an orange; "do you know Sinclair? He is in Rome just now—we left him there. He took on Saville's valet, but found him too like his master to be a safe inmate. The fellow was always prying about, and get-

ting at family secrets ; and as he seemed as ready to impart information as to acquire it, this did not suit my friend at all. I only hope what he told was an invention of his own ; those French rascals never stick to truth, if they can help it."

" Is that old Saville you are talking of ? " asked a neighbour, who had not heard Roland's name ; " was it true that he inveigled Harcourt Clarendon into promising to marry his step-daughter, by making him believe she was breaking her heart for him ? It sounds almost too good a story to be true, but I was told it as a fact, and thought of writing to Clarendon to ask particulars."

" Here is his brother, who can give them, if you wish it," said Sir Henry, smiling blandly, as he quartered his orange ; " let me introduce you—Mr. Graham—Mr. Roland Clarendon."

Mr. Graham looked a little confused, but apologised with a ready courtesy that silenced the angry words on Roland's lips. He was obliged to assume a good humour he was far from feeling, fingering nervously the stem of his wine-glass, and wishing the decorum of society permitted such a relief as it would be to send the contents into the speaker's face. Half conscious of having given offence, and willing to obliterate it if possible, Mr. Graham turned the conversation to safer topics ; his cousin was Mr. Brudenell's friend, and though he was not often in that part of the world, and had never met Roland before, he knew enough of their common acquaintance to appear to know a great deal more.

" So Cecil Percival is doing duty in your place, I understand. Is he as strange as ever ? He was the most extraordinary boy I ever saw, and by what I hear, he is unlike other people now."

" He is one of the best fellows breathing," said Roland.

" So my cousin said, and one of the most perverse. By the way, he is going to be married, is he not ? "

" Upon my word, you seem to know a great deal more than I do ; he may be, but I am not in the secret."

" Then Rumour is as bad as she is represented, for

I heard it was to a beautiful relation of yours, who is about to be your neighbour."

" My aunt and cousin are coming to live near us—which of them is the lady in question ?"

And Roland pinched the wine-glass harder still, and wished it were the decanter. Graham smiled, and shook his head. " I shall not commit myself again ; only, if my news turns out to be truer than you think now, acquit me of being the gossip I appear. If I am misinformed, it is only representing both gentlemen as being more fortunate than they really are."

Sir Henry Mayne once more interposed, for he had been quietly noticing his young neighbour's face, and saw that it was time to change the subject ; so he drew them both into discussion on sundry knotty points at that time engaging the attention of the sporting public, and kept it up till they rose from table.

Sir Perkin took hold of Roland's arm as they were leaving the dining-room. " Well, well, well ? None the worse for cramming ? None the wiser either, Percival would say. He has no faith in you prodigies of learning ; declares one of my old clerks is worth a dozen of you. We mean to teach him he is wrong, do we not ? We must march with the times, as I tell him, and if we are to have baths and wash-houses, and Saturday holidays, whereas in our young days people did without—so we must let the public work be done by young gentlemen who positively can spell their own names, and know that two and two make four. I am glad you got through—very glad. I spoke to my nephew to-day—he knows the chief of your room, and he will introduce you, and after that, you must get on by your own cleverness. But I say, my boy," in a lower key, " if you want to step into a good thing, stick to Alexander. He is a relation of yours, and was very fond of your mother ; his private secretary is in bad health, and he likes a young one, and must have a gentleman. Charming woman his daughter ; saw you getting on with her at dinner, you young fox ; and you were quite right, for, between ourselves, she can get more out of the General than I can, or anybody else."

Roland was not in the most favourable mood for following this advice ; irritated by all he had heard, and longing either to quarrel with somebody, or rush home to quarrel with himself, it was irksome to return to the bright drawing-room, and feel the necessity of having words and smiles ready at command. But fate and Mrs. Lyndsay were resolved he should not throw away all his opportunities ; she soon regained possession of him, and having, by a coaxing gesture, brought her father near, contrived to make them better acquainted in a few minutes than they would otherwise have become in the course of months. The General decided that Clarendon was a fine, spirited youngster, very like his mother ; and Roland, in no less complimentary style, admitted to himself, that if he must be a Private Secretary, he should not mind touching up the grammar of so jolly an old fellow as that. He quite looked upon the secretaryship as the due reward of his intense application and enormous knowledge ; and felt it would be rather a favour to give his kinsman the preference. Notwithstanding this agreeable episode, however, he was impatient to depart ; and when he had handed Mrs. Lyndsay into her carriage, slipped away, unobserved by any one but Richard Graham, who laughed as he wished him good night, and asked if he would take a bet on the accuracy of his fashionable intelligence. He had no idea how nettled Roland was already, or he would have let the subject alone ; as it was, he received a very curt answer, and meeting Sir Henry Mayne soon afterwards, remarked that young Clarendon was a queer-tempered fellow—all the Clarendons were, he fancied. Indeed, Harcourt was more than queer—eccentric, at times, to an alarming degree ;—would shut himself up for days together when a fit of moodiness was coming on.

“A very judicious measure,” said Sir Henry, as he stepped into his carriage. “If everybody would do the same when their unwise fits came on, it would be better for all parties.”

Roland, meanwhile, had thrown himself into a cab (economy being no object now his fortune was made),

and was whirled to his lodgings at the full speed of the horse. The first thing he heard was that Gervase Wray had returned ; and on ascending the stairs he heard voices in his room. There was no mistaking the shrill broken English of Auguste, who having remained to gossip with Timbs, had caught his master on his arrival. The door being half open, and the man excited, Roland heard him distinctly as he came up.

“ I tell you, sare, and I have told you before, he was one bad man—ver bad ; he had no conscience—none ! He rob you—he rob me—he rob ze small boy in ze street, if he have one sou to take hold off. He rob his wife, zat poor Madame, who give him all, and who died —ah ! I know why ; ze break her heart about him, and he no care ; he eat, drink, sleep, all ze same. And he rob Mademoiselle of her last franc if he could. I say, he rob *me*—*me*, who live with him so long ; he take all my *épargnes*, le fruit *de tant de sueurs*—all I save ; he tell me he give me high interest, just as he give Mademoiselle ---bah ! as well toss it out of zat window. And he know zis not last for ever, and so he want to make one good marriage for Mademoiselle, and a good home for him and for me. He tell me she marry one rich man, and pay me double for what I lend. And he die, and leave no word about me, and Mademoiselle know nozing, and I am robbed. You tell me, Mr. Wray, zat all be right, but it is all wrong, and before Mademoiselle marries, she must hear me, and she shall.”

“ Of whom are you speaking ? ” asked Roland, who had stood unobserved in the doorway during the rapid utterance of the last few sentences. Wray, who was reclining in an easy-chair by the table, near which Auguste was gesticulating, occasionally thumping it with his flat hand, rose with alacrity to bid his friend welcome, giving him to understand by shrug and smile how bored he was by all this clamour.

“ I am sure, Clarendon,” he said, pointedly, “ you will agree with me, that if there is any claim on Mr. Saville’s estate, it would be much better to lay it quietly before his brother, and see what he will do, than to mix up Miss

Egerton's name in an affair with which she can have no concern."

Not even his love for Marion could make Roland prudent at that moment. His temper had been too much ruffled already to tolerate that such lips should make free with that name ; and regardless of Wray's hint, he turned fiercely round on the excited valet.

" I can only tell M. Auguste—and I advise him to attend seriously to what I say—that if I find him introducing that lady's name again into any story he may be inclined to repeat, or any complaint he has to lay against his late master, I shall take upon myself to make him repent it. He has talked a great deal too much already, and done quite enough mischief ; and I warn him now, once for all, that Miss Egerton is not to be annoyed by his applications, or insulted by his conjectures and remarks. You understand plain English, M. Auguste ?"

" Ah, sare, I understand *yours* ; I have often understood you. You had a language of your own, zat a shild might soon learn. You did teach on ze palm of my hand, as if I was deaf-mute, yes—and so I was, but not blind. No, sare, no. I did wish you *bonheur*, but—" And he shrugged his shoulders, and raised the teachable palms he spoke of, in an indescribable attitude of regret at the ruthlessness of destiny ; then moved to the door. Wray went with him into the passage, spoke a few conciliatory words, promised to let him hear the next day, and then came back to his friend.

" Rather suspicious, that last hint, Roland," he said, gaily. " I own I always thought you were mighty fond of the plausible rascal on the journey, though it was charitably supposed you were improving yourself in French. He is so proud of his English, however, I could not get him to speak his own language, and he has been going on with his ' bono Johnny ' gibberish the last half-hour. I am so much obliged to you for stopping his tongue."

" I'll stop it effectually if he does not take my hint," said Roland. " Wray, I want to talk seriously to you."

" May I ask if it is on the Pragmatic Sanction?—for if it is—" "

"Stuff! I have done with all that rubbish; this is something of real, vital importance. What can have led to such reports getting about as I have heard to-day?"

"What were they, in the first place?"

Roland detailed the remarks at Sir Perkin's table. Wray was silent for a short time; then leaning back in his chair, and striking the tips of his fingers lightly together, replied, "I believe I understand, if not the whole story, a great part of it. This babbling fellow may have fancied a great deal that never happened, but from what I saw, and what I know, I feel tolerably clear in the general facts. Mr. Saville, from whatever motive, let us hope from compunction, was as eager to secure a wealthy marriage for Miss Egerton as any fashionable mother could have been, and from the moment we all met, I know he kept his eye on Harcourt. He had shrewdness enough to see where the danger lay, and he made it his first business to lessen the influence of your beautiful cousin. Don't interrupt me; lookers-on see most of the game. He sounded me in his own charming way on your position, and your father's will; and after that, showed a marked preference for your brother. Indeed, he proved as much, by allowing him to pay for all her rides and excursions. You did not know that, I dare say, neither did she. Yes, he preferred Harcourt, certainly—the way of the world, you know—it does not follow that the young lady agreed with him. Whether he actually made a confidant of his valet, I cannot say, but the fellow seems to have guessed pretty nearly at the truth. The point where he shuffles and contradicts himself, is about a conversation he professes to have overheard between his master and Clarendon, which your brother says no one could have heard, the poor man spoke so low and indistinctly."

"Wray," said Roland, after a pause, in which he was revolving all he had heard, and trying to look the whole steadily in the face, "as a friend, caring for us all, what do you think about Stella and Harcourt? I have never yet had courage to press either of them on the subject,

and sometimes I fancy one thing, and sometimes another."

"So do I," said Gervase Wray.

"You think Harcourt loves her?"

"I have thought so, but I have sometimes altered my opinion."

"She cares for him, surely?"

"I think she does; but, my dear fellow, it would be too presumptuous for you and me to pretend to fathom a woman's heart. I have sometimes doubted, and then—I will be as frank as you—I have been mad enough to wish."

"To wish what, old fellow? Anything in which I could help you?"

"No, Roland; you cannot give me fortune enough to make her care for *me*. She must be a rich man's wife, or she will be as miserable as she would make her husband."

"Poor old Gervase! Have you been her faithful slave so long, to feel for her like this? Has she any idea of it?"

"I believe she considers it a law of nature that every man should be her slave, or her tool. I am not sure which she is making Percival, but if ever a man was stricken unto death, he is."

"Percival love Stella? But he always said he should not marry—he was in no position to think of domestic happiness—it would take him from his work. Oh! it cannot be; he must see and know that Harcourt's claims are superior, and he is too conscientious to indulge in vain wishes and fancies. You know those clever young parsons get so much praise and respect from ladies, that they think nothing of it; and Cecil cares more to bring Stella to church, and to set her singing chants and hymns after his fashion, and not after the organist's, than he does for her beauty or her smiles. He wants to do her good, and she likes him for it, that is all. But I know what I shall do before I sleep; I shall write to old Oliver, and have it all out."

Roland's letter did not take very long; a letter seldom

does, when the heart is full, and the hand is its faithful interpreter.

" MY DEAR HARCOURT,—I hope you received my few lines, announcing my success. It was a stiff examination, and I suppose I passed tolerably well, as Sir Perkin asked me to dinner to-day, and General Alexander was civil and good natured. His daughter, Florence Lyndsay, was there ; nice and pleasant, and prettily dressed ; no more like a widow than Stella, whom I hope never to see in that character, however becoming. Sir Perkin, by the way, put me up to a good thing ; and if you hear of your little brother being appointed private secretary to a big-wig, and drawing a tip-top salary, you may perhaps admit for once, that the right man is in the right place. Our friend the Squire pooh-poohs these examinations, but I think they are the only way to secure good service, and keep out the idiots who can neither read nor spell.

" I am to be introduced to my chief to-morrow, and begin my duties at once. Sir Perkin has promised me an early leave of absence, as I am a little fagged, and shall be glad of a whiff of fresh air before settling down in earnest. I have no fear of not rising, as others have done, and the secretaryship seems pretty sure. So now I am fairly started, and can no longer refrain from entering on the subject nearest to my heart. It is no secret to you that I love Marion Egerton, for you knew it from the first. When you objected so strongly, you did not believe I was in earnest, and you disliked, very naturally, the idea of a connection with poor old Saville. The more I hear of him, the more I feel you were right enough there ; but the objection exists no longer, and to herself I defy the world to raise one. I knew I had no right to speak so long as I was idle, and I would not do so till I had given you notice. I want to be sure you will give me your hearty good will in the matter, and back me up, in case the old folks turn rusty. I shall speak for myself when I come down, but you might do something to smooth my way. I rely on your kindness, as I have always had reason to do. Wray is just come back from

a hard visit, where he has been talked to death by argumentative old ladies. He reports that Stella is determined to eat her Christmas dinner at the White House, so your people must look alive.

"That fellow Auguste has been pestering us to-night with his wants and complaints. I sent him about his business, which seems, on his own showing, to consist of meddling with other people's.

"Write by return of post, and tell me when you saw her last, and how the darling was looking. I only wish I could write to her myself, but I must be patient a little while longer. God bless you, my own dear brother.

"Yours ever,

"ROLAND CLARENDON."

CHAPTER XII.

SCIENCE MADE EASY.

HE had need of blessing, that brother well-beloved, when he had read that letter, and sat alone, considering how he should answer it.

He had foreseen that it would come to this ; he had tried to reconcile himself to the thoughts of it ; had walked through the rooms of the White House, conjuring up visions for his own illusion, with desperate resolves to believe in them, and finding them all dispelled by a single look from those eyes that were so unconscious of their own power. Never, since that day that she sat with him in his workroom, had he uttered a word to give her reason to believe he loved her ; he had never renewed the subject with the Vicar, or touched on it with his wife ; but this very reticence only served to fix it deeper in his own nature—a nature rarely hasty to receive an influence, and still more rarely disposed to lose it when once received. From interest and compassion, through regard and esteem, his sentiments towards Marion had gone on rapidly, silently, deepening in intensity, simply from passing through a heart unused to self-mastery on any higher

principle than pride, or to be denied a single indulgence on which his will was set. And it had now become a passion which he had no strength to overcome—which the very thought of overcoming sent the proud blood surging through his veins, as though some audacious hand had been laid on his ancestral rights. So hotly did it surge, that he was obliged to sit some time, pressing his temples with his strong fingers, before he could safely rise from his chair. Silently he sat and thought through the long, lonely morning, brooding, in bitterness and sorrow of heart ; for Roland, as we know, had been his angel, and he felt his love hung on that day's decision. And when at last he walked out in the clear, wintry air, to gain what relief action and exercise could give, that decision was not yet made, though the sorrow was rankling still.

He walked past the White House, turning his face away from it, and took the road that led to a hamlet which Marion regularly visited.

Perhaps he had an unacknowledged hope of meeting her ; but if so, he was disappointed, for the visitor that afternoon was Cecil Percival, and at a turn of the road they met face to face. By a sudden impulse, such as drives men to measures they would have spurned had they been suggested, Harcourt resolved to consult this oracle, of whom no one could ever say that he had prophesied smooth things, or deceits, to high or low—to himself least of all. He held out his hand more cordially than usual.

“ I am glad to have met you, Percival ; I am going to surprise you.”

The curate stood still, breathless, but firm, as if expecting a blow. “ How ? ” he asked, as he might have given the word “ Fire ! ” to a file of executioners.

“ By asking your advice.”

“ Indeed ? ” The word did not express much, but concealed a great deal.

“ I have a point to decide between two men,” Harcourt went on, looking, not at his adviser, but straight away at the distant landscape ; “ and the question I have to consult you on amounts to this. You teach the doc-

trine of self-abnegation (you see I have caught the correct word), of self-denial, of self, in short, put aside altogether, and on all occasions, in favour of everybody else. Is a man called upon by such a doctrine to give up to another the woman he loves?"

"What can have put it into your head to ask such a question of *me*?"

"Never mind that, if you can—if you dare answer it. I have not yet found the power, or the courage."

"I have always courage for the truth," said Percival, rather sternly; "it is easier to speak than it is to hear."

He stood thinking after saying this, and Harcourt did not disturb him.

"There are two ways of looking at your question," Cecil said, at last, "and I will state my opinion in very few words. If a man finds two people attached to each other, and because he forms a passion for the woman, endeavours to lure her from her plighted troth, that man is wrong—no matter how successful, or how true his love. But if he find himself opposed to a rival, whose best, or whose only right lies in his birth, or his position, or wealth, or his superior attractions, and the field is open to both—then I say, there is no duty that calls on him to give way. He may stand boldly forward in her sight and his, and win if he can, what he has lost."

The emotion with which he spoke would have betrayed to a less pre-occupied listener that more was meant than met the ear; but Harcourt was still looking far away, and only heeded the purport of his words.

"If I understand you," he said, presently, "you do not consider that of two men, with equal rights, the one ought to yield to the other."

"If both love equally, both have a right to win," returned Percival, "provided there be no prior claim on either side, in which case, a high-minded man must school himself, if he can, to bear the cross laid upon him. He can hardly bear a heavier."

"You think not? And you call such a thing a cross? I do not follow that phraseology. If it means something to be carried in a saintly manner, so as to draw admira-

tion, and acquire merit, it cannot concern me, or—the parties I am speaking of. To them a wrong is a grievance to be righted, and a rival an obstacle to be put out of the way."

"Clarendon, in your very bitterness of tone, you betray the galling pressure on your shoulder. You have burdens to bear like others; be warned in time how you bear them. Carried in a higher strength than our own, they lift us upward; but rebelled against, thrown off, or misused, they become a weight that will crush us to powder."

"Well," said Harcourt, with a long, deep sigh, and attempt at a smile, "I may say, 'thou hast comforted me marvellous much.' It is not often I consult the oracle, either for myself or others, and it is a rare boon to get an answer that may be taken as you please. Thank you for listening to me; I will detain you no longer, for I know your time is precious."

"Will you permit me to detain you one moment in return?"

"Not if you are going to spoil your good service by any personal advice. I tell you honestly, I am in no state to bear it. You know yourself, that what may be very wholesome under one set of circumstances, may be equally dangerous under another."

"I never obtrude advice, Clarendon, and I should hardly begin now with you. If what I have to say concerns you, it equally concerns myself. I wish to ask you a serious question, and to make sure before I ask it that you will not consider it an offence."

"I can promise nothing; but if I do, it will not much matter, I suppose. I cannot call you out, and you would be a match for me in most things; at least, you would have been formerly. You have grown much thinner, Percival. Do you starve yourself, or what is the reason?"

"Thinner, am I?" He looked at his hands as if the idea were quite new. "Nonsense! I am as strong as a horse. A man does not live longer, or work better, for being like your sleek carriage-horses. I live only too

well—too luxuriously. Clarendon, I must ask the question at once, or my nerve may fail. Are you engaged to your cousin?"

Harcourt stared at him in amazement at the unexpected query.

"Certainly not. Why do you ask me?"

"Is there any probability that you will be? Is her affection yours?"

"Upon my word, Percival, your curiosity exceeds mine. I have never taken upon me to inquire. Allow me to suggest that these questions require an explanation."

"That I can give frankly, or I should not have asked them. If you had said 'yes,' my path in life would have been decided. I have had an offer of missionary work, and should have accepted it at once."

Harcourt laid his hand on his shoulder.

"You are a good fellow, and I am very sorry to hear you say this. I hoped you knew better. If you love my cousin, you do her great honour, for of the many who have admired her as she deserves, few have had half your worth and honesty of character. Between her and myself, I say at once, there has never been any engagement whatever, to give me a higher claim than you; nor have I any right to presume that I should be preferred to another. But, Percival, if I know either of you, such a woman is not the one to make you happy."

"Stop there. You may think it nothing to discuss your own relation and friend, but to me she is much more, and I will not hear a word that is not in her praise. If I have spoken openly to you, it is because my honour requires it. To her I have never spoken, and I do not know if I ever shall. I have nothing to offer her now that she would accept. I could not have remained here to see her your wife, but I can refrain from selfishly causing her annoyance, and I will. This is safe with you, I feel assured. Thank you."

"Wait a moment, Percival; let me understand you. If I had told you that I loved Stella Porchester, and hoped to win her, would that have been sufficient reason to you for sacrificing your own wishes?"

"It would have been enough to show me where my duty lay, and it would have been at my peril if I had neglected it. You have relieved my heart of a load—I wish I could relieve yours."

"I wish you could. Good-bye." Harcourt jumped over a gate leading into a wood, and was in a few moments out of sight.

Out of sight, but not of hearing, and Cecil listened to his receding footsteps, audible among the crackling boughs and dead leaves, some little time, before he turned slowly in another direction. Wild visions of hope flitted before his mind, as he glanced at the White House so conspicuous among the leafless trees. Would Stella Porchester indeed be satisfied to give up the life of variety and admiration to which she was accustomed, for the comparative monotony of a parsonage—and if she would, should he make peace with his uncle, and secure her a home at Durningham? This last involved a great deal, and was not to be thought of without a little preliminary argument. To be willing to put up with Mr. Holmby's dictation, poor old man, so utterly inadequate as he had become to meet the wants and claims of his parish, simply because he wished to marry, revolted him too much to be admitted. But the case looked different, when viewed in a different light. Mr. Brudenell had great influence with both Squire and Rector; what Holmby called new-fangled at Durningham, because past sloth and stupidity had parted with their privileges, was found no fault with at Stourbrooke. Julian Brudenell was the safe model always held up by those who coveted the epithet of "judicious." If he went back to Durningham supported by that authority and influence, and with all his good deeds at Stourbrooke as a proof of his fitness, then indeed—his heart beat more proudly again, for such a return would be a triumph, while the other would be a disgrace. And he thought of life passed in ever increasing usefulness and reputation—the highest offices in the Church open to his reach, and Stella who had begun with him in comparative obscurity, finding herself repaid by increase of honour and distinction, which she should

delight in owing to him. How golden looked the grey wintry landscape through this fairy medium—how impossible it seemed to come down at once from the sunny heights of fancy, to teach little girls in stuff frocks and holland pinafores ! He could not give a lesson that day ! he had too long neglected his old Durningham friends as it was ; he would walk over now, and see the dear people who loved him so well, and who had stood by him against prejudice and misunderstanding—Mrs. Giles and Mrs. Allen, and good, well-meaning Miss Holmby, whom he had so patiently endured, in consideration of her kind intentions—he would walk over immediately, and gladden their hearts as well as his own. And away he went accordingly, and not a word could any one have said why he should not, if it had only occurred to him to let his little scholars know.

It must just be observed here that those who had expected to be amused with good stories of Cecil's revolutionary proceedings in Stourbrooke had hitherto been disappointed. The Vicar's behaviour towards his curate had been, from the first, such an appeal to his high breeding, that Percival would as soon have thought of attacking him in his own pulpit, as of going against his wishes in the parish. Where every suggestion he made met with courteous consideration, instead of repulse or ridicule, and his opinion was deferred to, whenever it could be proved that he was right, no inducement was left for beginning hasty schemes in a moment of excitement, and carrying them on afterwards because they were opposed. Something might be attributed to the growing passion which kept his imagination diverted to one particular subject, instead of expending itself in projects for the general weal ; but there had been enough hard work during the epidemic to test his zeal and steadiness, and his conduct had justified Mr. Brudenell's confidence.

Lately, while the elders had so many sick to whom they wished to devote their time, the school had been left more than usual to their younger assistants ; and Cecil and Marion had been regular visitors. And a sudden, but vivid conviction of the excessive dulness of

the school routine, and the deplorable ignorance of the maidens of the rising generation, led to an announcement on Mr. Percival's part, one afternoon, of a course of lessons he proposed to give the girls, twice a week, at an hour specified, usually devoted to needlework. Anything being preferable, in the opinion of some of those future helpmeets for man, to the sewing of linen and calico, or the mending of holes and tears, made (as if on purpose) by aggravating brothers at home—this proposal was received with grins of approval, and the next day he began his course on Natural Philosophy, which had now reached its fifth lesson. The first had been very popular; he took great pains to be simple in language, and lively in illustration, and his presence being in itself a joy to some sensitive members of the audience, who trembled all over with excitement if he only looked at them, they quite enjoyed the change from seams and patches, and had wonderful stories to tell to their small listeners at home. But as the novelty went off, and the words grew harder, and Mr. Percival talked faster, and grew impatient if he was not understood, things began to look more serious. An alarming discovery that they were expected to remember all they were told, so as to stand an examination next time, nearly reduced the school to despair; for though the questions were confined to the first class, all felt the consequences if the teacher grew vexed; and an angry look from Mr. Percival was something too heart-breaking to be encountered, if it were possible to avoid it. Yet how to answer such questions as he put, and expected to have answered, remained a problem, not easy of solution. Thankful were scholars and mistress, when, instead of the curate that afternoon, Miss Egerton came in, expecting to be just in time for the lesson.

Perhaps, of all his disciples, old or new, there was no one who by this time more thoroughly believed in Cecil than Marion Egerton. Like good Mrs. Black in the "Inheritance," she was still in the golden age of innocence, when belief in superiors is strong and lively; and both her uncle and his curate were in danger of falling

short of the ideal excellence with which her imagination invested the English clergy. So good as they were, it naturally followed they must be perfect ; and if Uncle Julian could do no wrong, it was becoming no less a rule, that Mr. Percival, with his zeal and devotedness, must pretty nearly always do right. Though quick at discerning false from true, she was sanguine in belief that what was true when spoken would prove itself so in deeds ; and wondered at the incredulity of her aunt when she came home with her heart glowing with hopefulness touching the amendment of some sadly lax old neighbour, who had given vent to one of her periodical fits of remorse to the dear young creature who spoke so kind, and who really did mean to begin—well, not to-morrow, my dear, because it was market-day, you see, and she'd be all day long on her feet, and tired to death—but come Sunday next, and she really would make herself tidy, and go to church, that would she ; it would do her a power of good, she was sure. It did Marion so much good to come home and promise that Goody Gricee was turning over a new leaf, that it was a sad shock to be told it was the tenth she had turned at the very least, and that each had proved rather worse than its predecessors. But even proofs of the accuracy of the statement had not yet taught her the too painful lesson—a lesson some of her own past experiences might have helped her to learn—that to see and know what is right is not always to do it.

Her ready belief and docile obedience made her invaluable as a follower to so exacting a teacher as Cecil. To her, in Roland's absence, he relieved himself by pouring out his schemes, his opinions, his altering views, and his high aspirations, as fast as they appeared or altered in his own mind ; and if she could not always implicitly agree, or even understand, she almost always admired, and listened with respect, eager to learn, and longing to imitate. She worked untiringly at everything he gave her to do, unaware how often Mrs. Brudenell, sooner than have her darling overtired, refrained from employing her herself, when she would have been glad of her help. And more than once had she fought his battles,

when some new notion of his, somewhat vehemently obtruded, was discussed at the Vicarage tea-table ; her uncle pretending sometimes much more hostility than he meant, for the amusement of seeing her ruffle up in his defence.

As to the present matter in hand, she had heard from Cecil so much about the fatal waste of intellect among the poorer class of women—he had spoken so powerfully on the change that would be brought about by giving those hard-worked housewives, servants, and mothers, something true and ennobling to think of, in the ordinary phenomena of every-day life—he had described so graphically the ruinous results of ignorance in neglect of the simplest sanitary rules, and wilful carelessness in cooking their food—that she had only been able to acquiesce and commend, and think how fortunate the parish was to have one so ready, and so capable of giving the necessary teaching. So she went to the Natural Philosophy lesson when she could ; but having other duties, missed the last, and had been too busy with her own class in the morning to inquire about it. She was not prepared, therefore, for the state of collapse in which she found the school this day. Miss Poole, the mistress, a methodical, efficient person in her own line, but quite lost in any other, had been putting the elder girls through a preliminary examination, which had brought out some startling results ; and as it appeared that the pupils who did remember anything, had each understood something different, and the mistress differed from them all, as a whole it could hardly be called satisfactory. So all turned eagerly to Marion—the girls with that unlimited belief in young ladies' knowledge, which school children generally have—the mistress, in a somewhat injured tone, to relieve herself of a grievance.

“ You see, Miss Egerton, if Mr. Percival had only been good enough to bring me the book he promised, relating to the lesson, I could have taken care the children remembered it ; but he teaches them out of his own head, with only the chalk and the board, and tells them a great deal at once, and expects them to answer questions off

like print when he comes again. Now really, ma'am, this is rather hard upon us all, and if I could do it without the book I would ; but it is what I do not pretend to teach myself, and I must speak to Mrs. Brudenell if it goes on, I must indeed."

Marion was sorry—hoped it was only for once—recommended trying once more, and offered help. What had the lesson been about? The question was put to the girls ; they looked at each other, and some tittered, but no one answered at first. At last one said, "Please, 'm, the kettle."

"It wasn't, Sarah Jane, it was the teapot."

"It was both, please, 'm, and the fire too, and how you could put a fire out, by putting a pocket-handkercher into it."

"No, *on* it, Lucy—how can you !——"

"But it don't, please, 'm, for I tried with our Bill's, and it frizzled it all up in a minute, and he *was* just cross."

"And please, 'm, he said the best tea was made by having the teapot black and smoky—he did, Sarah Jane ! —and he said we was to try for ourselves, and me and Betsey did, please, 'm, with the new chaney teapot Mrs. Brudenell gave to granny."

"And was it better than usual ?" asked Marion, whom this volley of facts began to alarm.

"I don't know, please, 'm, 'cause the teapot cracked in two."

"Now, children, do not talk so fast, all at once," interposed the mistress ; "you deafen Miss Egerton. But if you please, ma'am, there is one thing they declare Mr. Percival said, which I cannot believe—I was busy with the little ones at the time—that they ought to wear white frocks and bonnets in hot weather. White frocks in a school, ma'am—I cannot conceive how a gentleman could imagine it possible—they would not be tidy an hour, and as to the washing, their mothers never could manage it. Why, dear me, their print frocks get inked and dirtied fast enough ; what they would be if they wore white muslins, I cannot pretend to say."

"White muslin! I should think not, indeed. There must have been some mistake."

"I think so too, Miss Egerton; you'll excuse my saying there has been more than one mistake, and I really must speak to Mrs. Brudenell, unless you would be good enough to do so, for here is a whole afternoon gone, and the Vicar's shirts not finished, and the girls all unsettled, and their mothers finding fault with me. I cannot see the good it does them, and I cannot pretend to teach such things, only leading them into mischief. There is that child, ma'am—she may well hide herself behind Carry Simpson—as nearly as possible scalded herself and her brother to death, trying to put a cork in the spout of the tea-kettle, to see if it would blow the roof off. You would hardly believe it, ma'am, of such children as that, that they should be so keen upon mischief—but her aunt told it me herself. It is a mercy they are both alive."

Marion thought so too, but mildly suggested that some explanation of all these curious illustrations must have been given in the lecture, and was at once directed to the board, whereon glared in the eyes of the school the terrible words, "RADIATION—CONVECTION—CONDUCTION—COMBUSTION," with sundry diagrams in white chalk, carefully preserved from the last lesson, but only to be regarded with wondering dismay. If Miss Egerton understood them, there was a hope left, and all eyes stared at her, as she stood looking at the board.

And at that most ill-chosen moment, who should come into the school but Mrs. Brudenell, and old Mr. Holmby, the rector of Durningham. Miss Poole grew scarlet with annoyance, uttered signals that were at first hardly heeded, and could only by strenuous gestures restore anything like order to the arrangement of the pupils; while Marion, conscious how much handle was given to criticism, buckled on her armour in haste to defend her colours. They were expecting Mr. Percival every minute, to give them a lesson, she explained, before any comment could be made, and were talking it over before he came, otherwise they would all have been quietly seated at their work. Should Miss Poole show Mr. Holmby some of

their needlework? Really, some of the girls had improved very much in their stitching, and Miss Poole took a great deal of pains. And fervently did she hope the conversation would take so decided a turn in the direction of seam, and gusset, and band, as would postpone all mention of Natural Philosophy for the present. Mrs. Brudenell, however, was in no hurry to make an exhibition of performances; she had brought the old Rector in to see the size of the room, as his own was out of repair, and the Squire had volunteered to build a new one on the pattern of Stourbrooke. The discussion of height and length and breadth gave mistress and scholars breathing-time; Miss Poole's cheeks and nose were regaining their ordinary colour, and Marion hoped all would pass without notice, or that Percival would come in to manage his own affairs. However, she was destined to be disappointed, for in the midst of a history of the rain coming through the roof, and the sight of money that had been spent on the building from first to last, it being a ramshackle concern originally—Mr. Holmby turned to observe, in his loud, tremulous voice, “I met Percival as I came, but he did not see me; he was tearing across the fields just as I drove down the road. He is gone to see my sister, I hope; she is very fond of him, though they'll argue on Brady and Tate by the hour together.”

“Gone to Durningham, is he?” said Mrs. Brudenell, with a demure glance at her niece. “Don't you think, my dear, they might as well get to their sewing at once?”

“Certainly,” said Marion, biting her lip, as she detected a sarcastic smile on that of Miss Poole. “Indeed,” she added rather petulantly, “I think they had always better go on working till the lesson begins. It is impossible for Mr. Percival to be punctual to a minute.”

“So it appears,” said Mrs. Brudenell, drily. “When is the Vicar to have his shirts, Miss Poole?”

“Indeed, ma'am, that is more than I can take upon me to say, if we are interrupted as we have been lately,” was Miss Poole's quick retort on Miss Egerton's last observation; “the children's time is so much taken up with other things.”

"What is all that about?" here demanded the old Rector, pointing with his cane at the unlucky board. "Spelling lesson, hey? Let's hear how you can do it. Stand up, you Laura Matilda, or whatever your name is—if I pick out a fine one, I am pretty sure to be right—stand up, and spell it to me. Speak out, for I am a little deaf."

Sarah Jane rose reluctantly; her eyes rolling on Miss Egerton in despair. "You can spell that word, I am sure," said Marion, in the blandest tone of encouragement, and wishing Miss Holmby had been anywhere before she lured the curate away on that particular afternoon.

"Of course she can," added Mrs. Brudenell; "start off, Sarah, and do us credit."

So Sarah Jane started off, and spelt, in all its due syllables, the dreaded Radiation.

"Well done," said the old gentleman; "now for the meaning."

"Tell Mr. Holmby what it means," said Mrs. Brudenell.

The child glared at Marion, and was evidently on the verge of a howl. Marion threw herself into the breach.

"They have not learned the meaning quite yet, sir," she said, but not quite loudly enough for Mr. Holmby to hear, who replied, "Not know it yet? Pass on to another. Here you, Clementina Jacquelina, take her down, and give us the meaning."

But Betsey looked even more hopeless than her predecessor. "It is not a spelling lesson at all, sir," shouted Marion, now scarlet in her turn.

"Not a spelling lesson, my dear? Oh! What is it, then? A copy? Let us see, let us see—I am a great judge of pothooks and hangers."

"No, sir—not a copy. They were going to have a lesson on Natural Philosophy."

"On what?"

"On Natural Philosophy, sir. Mr. Percival teaches them, but I suppose he could not come to-day."

The old gentleman stared at her through his spectacles, nearly as hard as the children had done. "Teaches

them Natural Philosophy, does he? Oh!" He took his spectacles off, and rubbed them significantly. "I should like to hear what they have been learning, for I cannot say that any philosophy comes very natural to me, and it is the first time I heard it did to him. Suppose they tell us a little about it. Begin, you Sophonisba."

He had put his spectacles on again, and his old eyes twinkled behind them, as he observed the alarm of the school, and the offended attitude of the mistress. Marion, desperate at the idea of the teapot and kettle being paraded before so hostile a critic, whispered imploringly to her aunt; and Mrs. Brudenell at once interposed, protesting that she knew better than to allow her children to be examined by such a judge, unprepared; if he came over after Christmas, they might then be ready to show off,—meanwhile, they should be happy to sing to him instead. And joyful for the reprieve, the girls fell into their places immediately, and sang his favourite tunes, which Cecil had not yet attempted to banish, till they had forgotten their troubles, and he his little bit of malice.

Profiting by the opportunity, Miss Egerton made her escape, and in the darkening twilight of the brief winter afternoon, walked back to her home. She had promised Percival that a certain number of chants should be copied out from a collection he had borrowed of a friend; and this interval before tea was just the time she had relied on, for accomplishing the task. As she entered the Vicarage gate, a dog jumped upon her; it was Roland's favourite, Nelson, and Harcourt was close behind.

"Is your uncle at home, Miss Egerton? Down, Nelson, sir! May I come in and wait for him? I have had rather a long walk."

She could not but make him welcome, and would have brought Nelson in too, but he knew better, and lay down at the gate, as Roland had taught him. Marion lingered to caress his sleek head, and bring him water, and sweet biscuits, filched from Jane's private stores; and Harcourt watched her so doing, and half smiled at himself for feel-

ing for once like Colonel Gardiner. They went into the parlour, and she threw a log on the fire, and drew an arm-chair forward, and made him sit down and rest ; he would excuse her going on with what she had promised to do—she could talk and listen just the same. And she opened her music-book, and began rapidly transcribing the notes, thinking the kindest thing to a man so tired as he was, would be to show him there was no occasion for him to talk.

The firelight played on her shining hair and blooming cheek ; and he was content, at first, to recline in silence, and watch her as she wrote, following every movement of the small busy fingers, every turn of the bright head, that had become to him so fatally dear. Could he ever have imagined they would be so—or that a day would come when he should feel, in utter bitterness of soul, it had been better for him to have died as Saville died, than to have accepted his dying charge ? There she sat, unconscious of what was coming ; too accustomed to his presence to be disturbed by the recollection of what had passed between them, remembered only as an instance of his chivalrous generosity. She had never thought he loved her, but that he believed her destitute, and offered her a home—whether instigated thereto by his own compassion solely she had never dared to investigate—and her uncle and aunt had encouraged the opinion without divulging Harcourt's secret. That his affection had been really won, never occurred to either of the three.

It grew dark before Marion had finished her first page, and she was about to ring for a light, but he interposed. “ Do me a favour and wait a few minutes. This firelight is so soothing, and I am sure you want a little rest too. You looked as if you did when I came up to you.”

“ I had been a little vexed, but that is over now ; I am not tired. You must leave off thinking of me as a convalescent, for I never was in better health.”

“ I am sorry for it ; I wish I could give you a relapse. I like you best as an invalid.”

“ Thank you, but I prefer being well to looking interesting. I gave you all quite trouble enough as it was.”

“ You will never know half the trouble you gave.”

She shook her head. “ That I can quite believe ; but some day I may have my turn, and be able to take trouble for you. I find it no grievance to owe more than I can repay.”

“ Marion,” he said, in a low, pleading voice, “ if I thought, by exposing myself to suffering and danger, I should make you feel towards me what I have felt for you, you might be called upon to do your part to-morrow.”

There was something in his tone as he called her by her name that touched her too much to give offence or alarm ; she felt sorry, very sorry for him, for she feared he was in depressed spirits, but she could not reply to such a speech, and regretted having allowed the conversation to take a personal turn. He, on the other hand, felt that the die was cast, and rising from his chair, and leaning against the mantelpiece, with his head bent down near to hers, he poured out his love—not with that calm, tender gentleness with which he had wooed her before, but with the almost despairing earnestness of a man who pleads for his life. A little more, and he was kneeling by her side, almost crouching at her feet. “ Marion, Marion, say you do not quite refuse me—give me only the hope that I may win you at last !”

She had tried to make him listen several times, but in vain ; now he had seized her hand, and she felt how burning hot was that which grasped it, and how fierce was the strength of the grasp in which she was so utterly powerless. But she saw that at all hazards he must be convinced, and mastered her own agitation and fear sufficiently to speak with decision.

“ Mr. Clarendon, listen to me—I entreat you to listen to me, and quietly, or I shall consider this an insult.”

“ There is no insult in a man’s telling a woman he loves her, except when his words are untrue—and you know mine are not.”

“ I am sure they are not ; I honour and esteem you too well to doubt it.”

“ Honour and esteem me—for what, Marion ? Do

you know what I am doing now? Do you know that I am wronging as tender a confidence as was ever reposed in man, and doing all the injury in my power to one I have loved for years, and can never replace from this hour? If you did, you would know, too, that though you might love me for the sake of my love, you could neither honour nor esteem me again. I know the worst that can be said, that can be thought, of my conduct; but the truth remains the same—I cannot give you up to another. I will make you love me, Marion, in spite of yourself; I will make you so happy, I will enable you to do so much good, I will fill your life with so many pleasures, innocent, rational, elevating pleasures, that you shall bless me, night and morning, for winning you, and only pray for me, that I may deserve you more!"

"It cannot, cannot be," she said, as steadily as she could. "I know you are a generous friend; I have thought of you as such, and if you did but ask what was in my power—but I cannot deceive you, or pretend to love you, when—"

She could not finish the sentence, but he started to his feet as if the words had been spoken. "When you love another better—is that what you meant to say?"

"You have no right to ask me!" she replied with spirit, while the tears sprang to her eyes. Her courage had begun to fail, and she was longing for her aunt to come in, when they were both startled by a familiar sound at the gate. It was Nelson's joyful bark, and Roland's voice quieting him.

"Why, old fellow, what are you doing here at this hour? Good taste, I must say. Here, Nancy! are the ladies at home?"

Nancy's answer was inaudible; Harcourt, who had turned white as he listened, snatched up his hat, and with one look at Marion—a look she remembered long afterwards—was just in time to stop Roland from coming in. "They are engaged—they cannot see you now—come home," he repeated, rapidly and imperatively, linking his arm in his brother's, and almost forcing him again into the road. His manner was so strange, Roland

almost forgot the disappointment. "What is the matter? Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, yes; I got it, of course. What has brought you down to-day?"

"Oh, I was introduced by Sir Perkin's nephew, and my chief is a good-natured fellow, who knows him well, and I fancy they had both had a hint that I had not passed badly, and ought to have rest; and so, when I screwed up my courage to ask if it mattered whether I began work a week later or not, he laughed, and said he thought they might make shift to manage without me for a few days; so I rushed home to pack, left old Gervase to make my excuses in half a dozen places, and took the next train."

"What made you go to the Vicarage instead of coming straight home?"

"I did not intend to call, but, you see, as I was walking from the station, I could not resist passing the windows, just on the chance. What had taken *you* there, by the way?"

"I had a question to ask; we will talk it all over by-and-by. Here come our good friends," as Mr. and Mrs. Brudenell, having parted with Mr. Holmby, emerged from a cottage they had been visiting together.

Roland stepped forward to shake hands. "Give me joy, Mrs. Brudenell, of my first holiday."

"I am more likely to give you joy on getting something to do. Holiday! Why, you have had nothing else all your life, ever since I have known you."

"Then now my working time has begun; I have every prospect of rising, I assure you. I say, may I call to-morrow morning, to speak on an important subject? May I come to breakfast?"

"If you will promise not to show your nose in the kitchen, for eggs are scarce, and Jane will be busy."

"I have no intention of intruding on Jane. Expect me after Church. I hope Miss Egerton is quite well?"

"I hope so too, but I doubt it. Upon my word, that boy Cecil is enough to drive any one crazy, and to see

Marion's face this afternoon was as good as a play. We will tell you all about it to-morrow. Good-bye."

The Vicar and his wife walked on, and the brothers pursued their way in silence; Roland pondering what the last remark could mean.

"Jealous, are you, Roland?" asked Harcourt.

"Not at all; Cecil knows my sentiments, and would have been the first to give me warning. Noll, you have not yet said a word about my letter—you must know how anxious I am."

"I have a great deal to say to you, and would rather say it at home," was all the reply; and nothing more was said on either side.

On going up to his room, Roland was surprised to meet Trail, in plain clothes, at Harcourt's door. "Why, what office are you supposed to fill now?" he asked, in that supercilious tone with which he never could help addressing this obnoxious *protégé*; "I left you a groom—what is your new character?"

"Mr. Clarendon has engaged me as his valet, sir, to his entire satisfaction, as well as mine."

"He always declared he never would keep a valet, and this is a choice beginning, but he must please himself. Have you given up the fine arts, then?"

"By no means, sir; my master is good enough to give me every opportunity of improving my taste."

"He had better improve his own," said Roland, turning on his heel with his hands thrust into his pockets, tingling with the keen desire he felt to fling the man down stairs. How his brother could take such a fancy to the fellow, he could not conceive, and it was with some difficulty he refrained from broaching the subjects till the servants had left them alone to their wine. Then he abruptly expressed his surprise, observing that to put such a fellow as that in a place of trust and temptation really seemed ridiculous.

"What could I do?" asked Harcourt, carelessly; "he could not ride decently—I took him out with me once, and the whole field laughed at his seat; he has no muscles for work, and he is quiet and handy about me,

amuses me with his airs, and sometimes with his adventures. I consider him a natural curiosity ; his memory is something wonderful, and his faculty of telling lies might serve as a model for an Oriental diplomatist."

"He should not tell one twice in my hearing, if he were my servant."

"Oh ! you are too scrupulous—you expect truth and honour everywhere ; now you are a Government official, you will soon be cured of that weakness."

"With my brother I am safe, at any rate. Harcourt, you said you would speak when we were alone. I can bear it no longer—tell me at once what you have to say."

He had noticed already that Harcourt had scarcely tasted any of the dishes handed to him, though he partook freely of the wine ; and now, watching his face more narrowly, he could see it was working with agitation. He drew his chair nearer, and stretched his hand across the table.

"We have always been frank with each other, Noll, and I can truly say there is not a thought or wish of mine I would keep secret from you."

"I wish you had never said a word to me about it ; if you could only have kept it to yourself like a man, I should feel more like one now. Roland, do you remember my begging you to leave us, that first night at Baden ?"

"Yes ; you had some reason then, I admit. Now——"

"I have more. It is impossible—you ask what I cannot give. I would do anything on earth that was reasonable—I would share this estate with you, if that would be enough ; or if you preferred, buy you a farm, or make you a handsome settlement, instead of an allowance——"

"If you talk like that, I shall think you mean to insult me. What is it you cannot do ?"

"I cannot give you up Marion Egerton."



CHAPTER XIII.

DIVIDED.

PERCIVAL was sitting up later than usual, transcribing from a very blotted and confused pile of MSS. a sermon for the following Sunday—an operation which cost him an amount of labour by no means generally appreciated. His fastidious and variable taste led him to revise and retouch every sentence several times over, and, when all was done, to the simple majority of the congregation it was pains thrown away. Mrs. Brudenell used to tell him so, by way, as she thought, of lessening his conceit; but the Vicar, if at hand, would always defend the practice, as showing a resolution to give the best work to the Master's cause. His own sermons were less laboured with the pen, because they were the result of a life's labour in the study. For the study our energetic curate never seemed to have time, and his compositions had to be drawn from the resources already stored up; and any one who does this long without renewing his stores, knows what hard work it becomes at last. With weary fingers and burning eyes, he was forcing himself to complete his task before going to bed, when a handful of gravel thrown up against his window-pane startled him from his occupation. He threw up the sash, and looked out. A tall figure was just visible in the faint starlight.

"Any one ill?" asked Cecil. He had grown accustomed of late to be summoned at all hours, and had given special orders always to send to him at night, instead of to the Vicar.

"No—it is I—Roland. Can you let me in?"

There was no joyous ring in that hoarse voice, and a nameless dread crept over the listener. Something was the matter—not sorrow, or it would have spoken out at once; had that frank, happy nature been suddenly led astray, and was he come to pour his remorse out in confession to his friend? The thought made him shiver, as

he hurried down, candle in hand, to admit the unexpected visitor.

"Do not disturb my landlord," he whispered, without expressing any surprise; "he works hard all day, poor man. Come up with me—I am glad I happened to be still out of bed."

Roland followed him silently to his room; the curate lighted an additional candle, put coals on his dying fire, and emptied an arm-chair of a pile of books with which it had been gradually filled. Mrs. Brudenell might insist on his having such a chair, but she could not make him sit in it, so long as it was heaped with other things.

"Sit down, Clarendon, and tell me what you will have. You are just off a journey, of course, and started without any dinner. I have an apparatus here, constructed after a plan of my own, that can brew you a cup of coffee, or cook up a basin of stiff soup, in five minutes."

"Thank you—I have dined. I dined at Morlands."

"Why, when did you arrive?"

"This afternoon."

"I met your brother to-day, and he did not mention that you were expected."

"I was not expected, and, what is more, Percival, it will be a long time before I shall be expected at Morlands again. You may as well know the whole at once—my brother and I have quarrelled."

"Heaven forbid!" said Percival, more shocked by his tone than by the intelligence, which he considered only the exaggeration of a passing resentment.

"Heaven has forbidden it, and pretty strongly too," returned the other, "but it does not alter the fact."

"You are not quite yourself to-night, my dear fellow, or you would not speak in such a manner," said the curate. "I can see you have been very much vexed and hurt by something, and if I can help you, I will. My means are not large, but if there is anything within their compass that can lift you out of a difficulty, or pull you through a scrape, you know it is yours, as if you were my brother."

"Brother?" repeated Roland, too excited for gratitude,

or even acknowledgment, “ I have no brother—a brother would not have treated me as I have been treated, and only learned to-night. Did I ever complain to any one of my father’s will? Did I ever grumble because one had all, and the other nothing? I have had it thrust upon my notice perpetually by other people, and I never gave it a thought. It is no disgrace to take an allowance from a father, and I felt it none to receive it from Harcourt. It was a pleasure to know how he enjoyed giving me all I wished for. I should as soon have dreamed of a child on its mother’s lap coming to terms and settlements with her, as of being disturbed about his doing me justice. And what has he done, by his own showing? From the first, I told him of my attachment to Miss Egerton—he knew it in Switzerland, he knew it better still at Baden—he did not like the idea, on account of Mr. Saville, and he did all he could to keep us apart. I bore that, because I was sure the more he saw of her, the more convinced he must be that I was right; I little knew what the end would be. Saville died—left her in his charge—and he sends me off to England directly, to get me out of the way. And why? Because he was all the while endeavouring to win her for himself.”

“ You are dreaming,” cried Cecil, his heart bounding with hope and fear.

“ I wish I were! I was dreaming until to-night; now I am awake to my bitter sorrow. I came down, as he knew, for I wrote to tell him I should, to learn my fate; I have now a fair prospect, and can honestly go to Brudenell and ask his consent; and I find——”

His voice was almost choked, and it was some minutes before he could resume more calmly. “ In a word, we are rivals, and not only so, but he has acted in an underhand manner, dishonouring us both. Before Marion Egerton left Morlands, he had asked her to be his wife, and after receiving my letter to-day, he asked her again.”

“ That was what he meant when he appealed to me,” murmured Cecil, with a pang of remorse, as he recollects his answer. “ If I had but known!”

“ Who could know? Whom would any one trust if not

Harcourt? I would have staked my life on his honour and truth. Even now, he is so far true, that he told me all this himself, and he would buy off my claims at my own price—faugh! Half the property, Percival, if I will only postpone asking Marion; I can then choose again—the world will be open before me, and perhaps I shall be all the happier. Likely, is it not, that a man would take money in exchange for the joy and hope of his life? He would not do it himself, neither will I."

"He loves Miss Egerton, then, in real earnest?"

"Who could help loving her? I was an idiot, not to see it before, but I really thought——"

"Hush—we need bring in no other subject till we have done with this. You said all you could, no doubt; I am afraid, rather too hastily."

"No, we were cool for some time, for I was slow of belief, and thought he did not realise what it was to me. I did not lose my temper till the end; but when it came to this, that he would never consent to, or assist me in such an union, I told him that until he did, I would accept no gift, or favour, or obligation from his hands—I would not eat his bread, or sleep under his roof, neither would I touch a farthing more of his money. He has disgraced himself and me, and till he owns it, we are as strangers, let it cost me what it will."

It was no use attempting to argue with such a resolution as this, in such a frame; and Percival only soothed him by sympathy, and endeavoured to persuade him to occupy his bed, hoping that a short sleep might make him more amenable to advice. Sleep was, however, impossible in Roland's excited state, and he sat with his friend till morning, sometimes in weary silence—sometimes beginning afresh, and going over the whole ground again—Percival listening with the patience of true affection, and revolving in his mind at intervals how he could best heal the breach before it had gone further. What the effect on his own hopes might be, he would not allow himself to consider.

Morning came at last, and unrested as the curate was, it behoved him to do his work; and having accommodated

his guest with the means of a hasty toilet, he prevailed on him to accompany him to the service, which Roland, miserable as he was, would have missed. The more miserable, the more fit, argued his adviser,—the rather that he was afraid to leave him alone; and accordingly, the tall figure and haggard face were full in view when Marion came in with her aunt. A deadly fear stole over her heart. It was well she had the service as a support, for she felt some terrible crisis was at hand, and needed all it could give her. Whether Roland prayed or not, it were difficult to say; to him the whole world was changed, and with it, his own nature. Hard, angry, bitter thoughts rushed thickly, one upon another, when he saw how pale Marion looked, as if she, too, had passed an agitated night; and thought of his glad hopes yesterday. “*Forgive us our trespasses,*” in the Vicar’s clear, sweet voice, thrilled on his ear, but not in his heart; he shut its doors against the gentle visitant; he was angry, even unto death, and he would not forgive, or yield, no, not an inch. He, too, could stand firm, where the right was on his side, and all the world should know it.

The service ended, he joined the ladies, and they all tried to speak in the painfully cheerful tone which people assume on such occasions. Oh yes, he was coming to breakfast, and it would be a treat to taste milk once more, without the flavour of the metropolitan pump—not to mention other condiments, on which he was beginning a popular story, but broke it off abruptly, when he observed how earnestly Cecil was speaking to the Vicar, as they issued from the vestry door. He was sure Mr. Brudenell knew all, by the tender pressure he gave his hand; and felt a wild, boyish longing to throw himself in his arms, and give vent to the passion of grief and rage now choking in his breast. But such things are rarely done among Englishmen, and he walked on, and talked very fast, and was so unlike himself, in his straining after intense liveliness of spirits all breakfast-time, that it was a relief to the whole party when they rose from table. The Vicar, as they did so, put his hand on his niece’s shoulder. “My love, will you do me the kindness to go into my

study, and copy out three letters you will find lying together on the table?"

It was always a great honour for Marion to be asked to assist her uncle, and she did not hesitate; though it just crossed her mind that he might have waited till Roland was gone. The dining-room door closed behind her, as she hurried to the study and began her task, finding it very difficult to refrain from impatience, and still more from harassing conjectures. She detected herself reading the same words over five or six times, without taking in their meaning, while revolving the questions that had kept her awake half the night, and could not be answered till she knew more. She was unhappy about Harcourt, and yet there was joy in knowing Roland was so near; and it never occurred to her that she could be a real cause of division between them. The dread that made her heart throb, though unacknowledged even to herself, was that the younger might feel it his duty to withdraw in favour of the elder; he had never spoken openly of love, however expressive had been his looks and actions, and he might feel that honour and gratitude required the sacrifice, which, as far as he knew, might be on his side only. As far as he knew—and yet, did he not know the truth? Had not their intercourse from the first been so sweet to both, that the future had become blended with images of union, without which it would be a desolate blank? Had not his name been on her lips that very morning, the foremost among the few for whom she prayed as we only pray for our soul's hidden treasures—and could anything compensate to her now, for the loss of the hope that had given it a right to be there?

So she mused, and wrote perseveringly the while, with no more idea of what she was writing, than the good people to whom the letters were destined would have of the emotions of the transcriber. They took longer than she expected, and she had just written the last "(Signed) Julian Brudenell," when the study door opening, admitted, as she thought, Julian Brudenell himself.

"I have just done," she said, without turning her head; "I hope I have not made many mistakes."

There was no answer, but a step across the room that was not her uncle's; and Roland came and sat down by her side. "Never mind how many mistakes you may have made in your letters," he said, with the smile that she had learned to think so irresistible, "only let there be none between us now."

It was as well that Marion's task was finished, as it would be difficult to conjecture, after this opening, what liberties she might not have taken with the original text. As she laid down her pen, Roland took possession of her hand.

"Your uncle and aunt have allowed me to speak to you now," he went on, "and they only stipulate that you should know everything. I can have but one wish on that point, and if I had had my own way, you would have been told everything before. But after what I heard you say about idle men, and all that was dinned into my ears on that score in this house, I made up my mind not to speak till I had given proof of my good intentions. The hope of this moment made up to me for all the dull hours I have been sapping in London, giving up hunting and everything—and I have really passed very well, they say, and have every prospect of getting on, and I do mean to do my duty, and work as hard as the best."

"I am sure you will," said Marion, as he paused for a moment.

"Then may I speak out now?" and as he talked of speaking out, his voice dropped lower, almost in her ear. "Is it necessary to tell you what you must have found out for yourself, that I have cared for nothing in comparison with you since the first day I saw you in Paris? It was entirely for the chance of meeting you again I followed you to Interlachen, and remained with you all afterwards; and every hour in your company made me love you more. I was very nearly telling you so that evening in the Allée; I think you must have guessed it, even then. And I have hoped we understood each other, even though we did not speak. You are truth itself; you could not deceive if you would—tell me if I may hope?"

She had no wish to deceive him ; her eyes were eloquent in their reply ; and the possibility of there being any mistake seemed too minute to be worth mentioning. She had understood, or hoped she did, but she was glad to be assured by his own lips of what was so sweet to know, and which he found so sweet to tell ; and though he took a long time to tell it, she did not find the topic wearisome, or the speaker too diffuse in style. Perhaps he lingered the longer on this sunny side of the path, from the consciousness of the dark shadow lowering near, into which she must pass by his side ; yet, linger and delay as he might, the whole had not yet been told, and he was pledged to tell it without reserve. So he named Harcourt, and felt the hand he held press his own nervously.

“ You know what has passed ? ” she said, in a low voice.

“ Yes, I know that he has endeavoured to supplant me—me, who confided in him from the beginning—and that he has failed. I don’t blame him for loving you—who could help it ? but he has acted shabbily by me, and therefore I would not sleep under his roof last night.”

“ You have not quarrelled ? —he loves you so dearly, and has been so good to me ! ”

“ We have had such a quarrel as men can only have once ; and unless he alters, it will be for life.”

“ No, Roland, no—not between brothers.”

“ Is it less of an injury to be wronged by your brother than by any other man ? ”

“ Not less of an injury, but easier to forgive. Think a moment—we have each other—he will be alone, caring for both, and having neither. Do not let me think I have been the means of dividing you, as a return for all the kindness I have received.”

“ You do not think any blame can attach to you. Tears in those dear eyes, darling ? I can bear anything better than that. What do you wish me to do ? Have you any idea of what he has been offering, to induce me, at any rate, to put off telling you I loved you ? He would have given me whatever I chose to ask, only to buy himself a respite, and a chance ; but consent to our

marriage he will not. And it came to this at last, that until he does, and acts and speaks as a brother should, I will not accept a farthing from his purse, or taste a crust from his table. So long as he behaved to me like himself, I thought no more of being beholden to him than to my father ; but this alters the case, and I would sooner starve than let him give me a shilling."

Long and seriously did they talk this over ; for let Marion soften matters as she might, she could not change the position of affairs, or avoid seeing that an engagement to Roland, supported by the affection of his wealthy brother, was a very different prospect from that of one formed under existing circumstances, his salary being as modest as his hopes of promotion and competence were bold. He laid it all plainly before her, as he had promised he would, and as he might safely do, for marvels of prudence are not common at two or three and twenty. She thought more of the breach between the brothers than of the loss involved therein, and would not see that a reconciliation must, in the very face of it, be at present impossible. Harcourt was generous and noble ; he had been peculiarly generous to her ; if he had spoken bitterly under the influence of disappointment, he would master himself in time, so long as he was not goaded by reproach, or repulsed by enmity. Better they should wait for years, if necessary, than that Roland should lose his brother and his home on her account. And when he repeated that all were well lost if she were gained, she felt it was very sweet to have won such love, but that he might one day think he had purchased hers too dearly.

"Let us consult my uncle and aunt," was the suggestion that was the easiest to make him agree to, and most comforting to herself. She knew they would do anything for her happiness, and that their advice was sure to be on the side of right ; and so the case was carried again to the anxious elders, who had been in earnest consultation in the interval, unable to attend to or think of anything else. They had long loved Roland, and they dearly loved Marion, and if they could have settled an annuity upon them at once, and let them be

happy then and there, they would have done it ; but what Mr. Brudenell had saved, his wife would need at his death, and it would only be a small assistance he could promise his niece. The chance of her regaining any part of her lost fortune was very remote indeed, so that her two thousand pounds were all the dowry she had to bring. Roland inherited from his mother a sum in the funds, of rather more than equal amount ; so that, taking the most favourable view of their joint circumstances, as to interest and salary, they could not make up much more than three hundred a year between them—a poor prospect for London expenses. An immediate or speedy marriage was out of the question, unless some provision were made by Harcourt. This the Vicar maintained he ought, and probably would admit he ought to make ; and Roland steadily protested he would not accept it if it were offered. Would it then be wise or right to enter on so indefinite an engagement ? That question, it was submitted, came too late ; they had allowed Marion to decide, and she had decided, and if they must wait, at any rate it would be easier to do so with an engagement than without it. It need not be so long as they thought—Roland had made friends, in a position to give him a lift, and as soon as he was back in town, he should stir them all up. Very soon, they would see, he should be pushed into a good berth. He had no fears about the future, now that he might call Marion his own.

He might have no fears, and in her presence he might have no real trouble, but, considering that he had always contrived, as his friends well knew, to get through more than the utmost they could reckon upon as a possible income, on his own little private expenses, the whole thing did not tend to raise the spirits of the Vicar or his wife. Mr. Brudenell finally closed the discussion by announcing that he must think it all over, and see what could be done, after he had spoken to Harcourt ; and so saying, he took his hat and walked out, leaving the lovers to his wife.

He felt keenly on the subject, for the two young men had each his own particular place in his heart, and

Marion, though a late comer, had special claims of her own. But for George Saville's conduct, she would now have been independent enough to marry whom she pleased, and it would be an additional wrong, if the son of Saville's friend should withhold that justice which would in some measure make compensation. So, before he went to Morlands, he took a solitary walk down a retired lane, in which he had often found inspiration, when the Muse, if such there be, who presides over sermon writing, failed him utterly at home. It was muddy and dull enough to break an author's heart who went there to be inspired, but that did not trouble the good man, who was used to mud, and uninfluenced by dulness. He wanted to think the whole matter over quietly, and there was no place so secure from interruption.

But where is that secure spot in the world in which security from interruption can be guaranteed? There was one cottage in this lane, inhabited by a labourer's family; and as Mr. Brudenell came within sight, a figure stepped out, and advanced to meet him. Not having on his spectacles, he did not at first recognise the said figure, as he came jauntily along, swinging a little cane in one hand—the other stuck on his hip; but as it approached, he saw it was Mr. Trail. The artist was passing with a graceful salute, à la Claude Melnotte, but Mr. Brudenell stopped him short.

"Are you going straight back to Morlands?"

"As straight, sir, as the meandering of the road will permit me."

"And as your old habit will permit you," said the Vicar, in a tone that, for him, was almost stern. "Foolish fellow, have you not bought your experience yet?"

"Bought heaps of it, sir, but it doesn't wear well, and that's the truth. Couldn't keep up to the mark, sir, at any price, without a slight stimulus. It in no ways interferes with my duty, and my master has never found fault with my personal conduct."

"No; if he did so once, it would be for the last time. Take care, Trail—you are dealing with a generous man, who will bear with you longer than many would, because

you are under his protection ; but if he once passes judgment upon you, your chance is gone. He will not relent."

" So I have been led to believe, sir ; it is a characteristic of master-minds—no pun intended, sir—those sparks of humour flash out before one is aware. May I ask if you can tell me where Mr. Roland's bag is to be sent ?"

" What bag ?"

" His travelling-bag, sir ; he brought no other luggage with him yesterday, and as he left it behind him at Morlands last night, I was afraid he might be inconvenienced in his toilet, sir. Shall I send it down to the Vicarage ?"

" Take nothing upon yourself till you receive orders," replied Mr. Brudenell, more angry than he had felt for some time, at the significant sarcasm of the inquiry. " If your master is at home, be so good as to give him that," handing him a card, on which he had just written, " Dear H., I am coming to have a few words with you. J. B." " You will not forget, sir ?" he added, with an emphasis that cowed the other at once.

" Certainly not, Mr. Brudenell ; he shall have it immediately, sir," he replied, and seemed glad to pocket the card, and shuffle away, without the graceful swagger he had been rehearsing before.

Mr. Brudenell walked on to the cottage, and rapped at the door with his cane.

It was not often any one was at home, as the good woman worked in the fields, or went out charing or washing, wherever she could get a job ; but to-day she was washing at home, and had to take her arms out of the tub, and wipe them on her apron, before she could admit her visitor. She was not alone, for her daughter, a pretty young girl at service in Durningham, had come over for a visit, and stood curtseying with pleasure at the sight of the Vicar. After a few kindly inquiries after the father, and how Susan liked her place at the Rectory, and whether she gave satisfaction to Miss Holmby—Mr. Brudenell came to the point, by asking quietly if Mr. Clarendon's servant were an old acquaintance ?

"Oh no, sir, sure—it's not more nor a few weeks we've known him at all, is it, Sue? But he went over to the Rectory for Mr. Percival one day, and he and Sue got talking, and since then he has been several times, and when she's come over to see me—Miss Holmby she is very kind, and sends her over when she can, yes, sir, she do, with allus some'at for father, and a pot of jam or a basket of eggs for Mr. Percival—and if ever a dear young gentleman deserved the good things of this world, he do. Dear heart, how beautiful he do talk, when one is all in knots, and can't lift hand or foot with the rheumatics—all about one's work, and one's dooty, till one is nigh upon mad to be up and about again, and can't stir!"

"You were speaking of Trail, Mrs. Smiles; does he often come and see you?"

"He come when our Sue comes, as I was a saying, sir, and of course, when I see that, I spoke to her and to him, did'n't I, Sue? for, you know, she is our only one, and father he don't like to hear on it; he says as Mr. Trail was no good before the Squire took him on out of charity; but laws, he don't know half we do, do he, Sue? Fetch the pictur, dear, and show it to Mr. Brudenell; a real pictur, sir, that he is painting, his own self, of my girl; and though I say it, she is as good as a pictur to look at, and better too. That's it, Sue; bring it here. You hold it for Mr. Brudenell, 'cos my fingers is damp with the suds. Ain't it wonderful, sir?"

It was wonderful as a specimen of hard, staring, vulgar oil-painting, with just likeness enough to Susan's pretty features to make it the more detestable as a whole. Susan, as she held it up for the Vicar's inspection, little knew how terribly her own face told against the *chef-d'œuvre* for which she coveted applause.

"He is a clever fellow," said the Vicar, "and has an eye for a likeness, if he only knew what to do with it, and certainly shows good taste in the choice of a model. Thank you, Susan; let me put it down for you," and he took it courteously from her hands, and returned it to its former position against the wall. "You give him sittings here, I presume—not at Durningham?"

"Oh, not there, sir—Miss Holmby would be shocked."

"And you see a great deal of him, do you?"

"Not as much as they would like," put in the good-natured mother; "but young things in service must bide, as I tell 'em, till they've put by a little to buy their bits of things decent. But Mr. Trail he says his wages is good now, and is to be raised, and he don't allus mean to be a servant neither; he speaks furrin languages, sir, and he repeats verses beautiful, quite like a print book, and he says Sue will live to be a lady yet, and he'll make her one, when she is his wife."

"Have you promised him, Susan?" asked the Vicar, kindly.

"No, sir," stammered Susan; "father don't like it; but then he don't know him, sir."

"Father don't like it at all, sir," added the mother, "and he calls him a scamp. He made bold one day to speak to the young Squire, Mr. Roland, you know, sir, who got him a job at the wood-chopping afore he went away, and asked him about Mr. Trail's character—he was a groom then, you know, sir, and had just begun to court my Sue——"

"Well, what was Mr. Roland's opinion?"

"Mr. Roland, sir, he took his finger and thumb, just so, and snapped them, Smiles says, right in his face, and says he, 'My good fellow, his character is worth that, and he knows that I know it.' So father tells Sue he won't have it, and he likes Ned Bridges a deal better."

"Ned Bridges, the blacksmith's son? Ah, he is working with his father now, I hear. You used to be great allies, Susan, you and he."

"So they was, sir," said Mrs. Smiles, who gave Susan no chance of getting in her word—"so they was, and a good lad he is, and a shame it would be to say he warn't; but he can't paint a pictur, and he can't say verses, and he knows nothing of the furrin languages, do he, Sue? And he'll never make her a lady, poor lad, let him hammer away from morning till night."

"Hammering is thirsty work," said Mr. Brudenell. "I hope Ned does not drink."

"Oh, none o' the Bridges does—not one on 'em. They takes their mug, as you or I might do, begging your pardon, sir, but never more. They gets down a sight o' tea, though, for I see 'em myself—it goes in gallons, it do, when once they begins at it fairly."

"I wish Mr. Trail had the same taste in liquids that he has in models," quoth the Vicar. And he advised, with little hope of being heeded, that he should not be encouraged; told them what he knew of his old habits, and urged Susan to trust her father, and consult Mrs. Brudenell. It would have been lost labour to argue about possible ladyhood under such auspices, while her mother was at hand to keep up the dazzling delusion; so he wisely confined himself to one point at a time. The reference to Mrs. Brudenell was promised, not without some misgivings on Susan's part, and the Vicar took his way to Morlands.

Harcourt was expecting him, and the visitor was shown into the library, where he had been apparently engaged in sorting and destroying papers and letters. He looked flushed and feverish, and his hand was burning hot—no wonder, as the Vicar thought, when he was sitting in so warm a room, for the fire had grown furious with all the piles of paper thrown upon it, and the smell was rather stifling.

"Very kind of you to come, sir; take that arm-chair. I rather expected you, and did not like to be out of the way; so your card was a satisfaction. Where did you meet Claude Melnotte?"

The Vicar explained, and added, "I have to speak to you on that subject also. He is courting Susan Smiles, a nice, pretty girl, whom my wife recommended to Miss Holmby as housemaid. He has a wonderful tongue, it seems, and has turned her mother's head, if not hers. Now, as I am sure he still indulges in drink, this would be a sad business if it went on. She has a steady lad, much attached to her, who might have a better chance if your servant were out of the way."

"You want him out of the way, do you, sir? Well, I can accommodate you. I am going from home, and

shall take him with me, and your young friends can marry meanwhile."

"Going from home—for long?"

"That does not follow; but I must run down and see my aunt before she begins her move, and Trail suits me better than many a steadier and more sober man. It sounds very discreditable, but the more you all cry him down, the more determined I am to hold him up. I do not require perfection; if he is sober in my presence, I ask no questions as to what happens behind my back."

"And if he personally offends you?"

"Oh, if he does that, like other people he must do it at his own risk. He knows the consequences, and will only have himself to thank for them."

The tone was not favourable to Mr. Brudenell's purpose, but he was accustomed to deal with human nature under trying circumstances, and was blessed with a larger amount of indulgence than most men.

"So you are really going away, Harcourt, are you?"

"Yes; what is the use of my staying at home? If there were anything worth remaining for, I would remain—as it is, the sooner I go, the better."

"I am sorry to hear you say so."

"I am much obliged to you for being sorry, and should be more so, if it did me any good."

"It should do you good to know you have friends who feel for you."

"Should it? If they would show their feeling, I might be more grateful."

"Come, Harcourt, you are a young man and I am an old one, and what we have to say should be said out openly; we need not be afraid to speak to each other on any subject, I think."

"I think differently; I am very much afraid of speaking to you on one subject. I am afraid I shall so speak that you will listen to me for the last time."

"No, my dear boy, you need not fear that. Your father's son would never forget himself so far; or, if he did," holding out his hand, "his father's old friend would forgive him."

Harcourt held the hand a moment, then withdrew his own.

" You know all that has passed, of course ? "

" I do, and I am very sorry—how sorry I can hardly say—that my sister's child should be the innocent cause of your trouble. But, Harcourt, you must have known the truth—she never gave you any hope."

" Did that make it easier to bear? Hope? I had learned to believe—idiot that I was!—that I had only to stretch out my hand, and the bird would fly into my bosom. I found it was a lie, like everything Saville ever said, but it had done its work. We know who works by lies, and he is no journeyman at his trade. He has done a masterpiece, as far as I am concerned. Mr. Brudenell, you should not have come near me to-day. I am in a wild, rebellious, wicked mood, and nothing you can say will make me feel as you would have me. That boy is with you, I suppose?"

" He came this morning; he told us everything, and we had no right to forbid his telling Marion. And I am come to ask you plainly, if you mean, now he has begun to work independently, to make him independent?"

" You ask this, before consenting to his engagement?"

" Not exactly; after allowing him to declare his attachment, I can hardly prevent their being engaged heart and soul; but I ask it, that I may know as Marion's protector, what she has to look to."

" Do you know on what terms Roland left me?"

" Yes; he feels aggrieved that you are his rival. Remember, he knows nothing of the circumstances, so honourable to yourself, which first led to your being so."

" No matter what he knows; I have as good a right to love her as he, or any other man. Because an impatient boy tells me of his fancy, which I know he may change in a month, am I to be forbidden to make my choice where he has made his? Could I go on as I did, thinking of her as my own, planning out a future that was to make her happy, and me in seeing her so, thinking that she was glad to be under my roof—glad to hear my voice—glad to feel the touch of my hand—could I go on

with such a dream, and not make it a reality? I did not know how I loved her when I asked her in this house to be my wife—I only thought of her loving me. Now I know she does not care if I live or die, but I know also that, living or dying, I shall never care for any other woman—that I love her better than any one, or anything in the world—and that I will no more stand by to see her given to some one else, were he fifty times my brother, than I would have my purse wrenched from my left hand, while I had a stick in my right. You may go back, sir, and tell him so."

"Not yet, Harcourt," said Mr. Brudenell, with the calm dignity that disarmed insult by ignoring it; "I have not yet said all I have to say. We will pass over the question of right and wrong between you on that point. Are you aware how your father, the most honourable man either of us ever knew, came to make such a will as he did?"

"I do not know exactly; I always supposed he considered it his duty."

"The facts were these—it is time you knew them. Your great-grandfather so encumbered the property, that his son and heir was many years a poor man, and had not very long, by his prudence and economy, cleared the estate before he died. As it came to your father, he wished it to come to you, but justice required Roland should have his share, and he meant to lay by a sum for him every year. You remember your old relation, Mr. Eddowes, Roland's godfather. I was present when he announced to your father that he had made a will, bequeathing all his money to his godson."

"He said that, the old villain?"

"He said it, and I believe it was true. At any rate, your father did, and it decided him on leaving the whole of his property to you, as the eldest son. Mr. Eddowes, as we know, did not keep his word, or rather altered his mind, and left his money to the Alexanders, but your father did not know that in time to make a new arrangement."

"What do you mean by telling me all this now?"

"I mean, that there should be no mistake in your view of Roland's claims. Justice requires that he should have at least a portion of the inheritance, which, but for that mistake, we know he would have had."

"You are a bold man, Mr. Brudenell. What would the world say if I told them that my excellent and most religious clerical friend only told me my duty to my brother when his niece's interest became concerned in it? Would it not give a fine opportunity to those who are fond of throwing stones at church windows?"

"I dare say it might, and these plain truths are often as difficult to speak as a clever lie; but you know better, and that is enough. So long as you acted from love to the poor boy there was no need of pointing out your duty."

"And he sent you to make an arrangement with me, did he?"

"Not at all; he declares nothing shall make him accept a penny from you till you consent to his marriage. Unless I am much mistaken, he can be as self-willed as yourself."

"Well, Mr. Brudenell, I am much obliged to you for your openness, and I will think of what you have said. Tell me one thing first—do you approve of this engagement?"

"Yes—I love the boy, and I think he means to be steady. Percival has very good hopes of his religious principles."

"Should you have approved had I been her choice?"

"My dear fellow——"

"No hesitation, sir—I am in no mood for half measures. Out with it at once—you do not think me good enough?"

"I am afraid, Harcourt, all is not with your faith as I could wish."

"That is, I do not go to week-day service, and not always on Sunday—I cannot swallow Cecil Percival's theories, or allow my understanding to wear blinkers because my fathers tugged along in them without kicking. But you knew as much of me long ago, sir, and have not thought it necessary to give me up."

"I should never give you up, Harcourt; but I hope, if I live, to hear you speak of these things in a different manner. We will say no more now, and I will keep you no longer from your occupation."

He rose, and Clarendon mechanically did the same, but turned to stir the fire, and stood there as if not aware his visitor wished to take leave.

"She has been taught to think of me as one who believed in nothing—one who had no soul to care for what is good and pure. If it were so, should I care for her as I do? You have told me sometimes, when we have talked of such things, that there was nothing you would not do for me, to convince me your views were true. You have had conviction in your hands, and you withheld it. By Marion's side I must have gone in her path; for right or wrong, false or true, where she went, I should have been with her; I had no wish to lead her in mine—but that chance, if it was one, is taken from me, and what the result will be remains to be seen. Are you going, sir?"

"Why should I stay, Harcourt, if you have nothing to say that does not grieve me to the heart?"

"Why, indeed? You have had enough of me for one morning, I should think. I wonder when I shall see you again."

"I will come whenever you send for me."

"That means, I am not to come to you."

"You had better not; your last visit gave very great distress, and now especially——"

"Now I am to leave Roland to his paradise. You are sure she loves him?"

"As sure as I am of her truth and sincerity. And Harcourt, I can tell you this, that she is very unhappy about this quarrel between you. If you have any real regard for her, you will consider her peace a little, if not your own."

"The quarrel is on Roland's side; if he will come to me, there will be one no longer. He spoke to me as I have never allowed any one to speak before, and never will again; if he does come back, therefore, it must be

in a different humour. My doors are not shut—he has but to walk in at his pleasure; only he had better lose no time."

"He shall lose none that I can help," said the Vicar; "and now good-bye, my dear fellow, and forgive me if I have overstepped my privileges."

Harcourt nodded, touched his hand, and again stooped over the fire, but Mr. Brudenell, looking back from the door, saw that his head had sunk on his arms, and his shoulders were heaving convulsively. He strode across the room in a moment, and laid his hand on the young man's hair. "God bless you, keep you, direct you, Harcourt—teach you in His own time, and in His own way, even if it be by one which we are too blind to discover—too ignorant to know!"

There was no reply, nor did the Vicar seek one, but left him without another word.

"Roland," he said, the moment he saw him, "go and see your brother directly."

But Roland was obstinate, and would not go—not that day, at any rate, on such a message as Harcourt had sent. In the morning he changed his mind and went, and found his brother was gone.



CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. LYNDSAY'S ADVICE.

A WEEK later, after her lover's return to London, Marion received two letters. One was from Harcourt, dated from Dover.

"When you receive this, dear Miss Egerton, I shall have left England, so you need not fear that I shall trouble you again. When I find I can approach you as a brother, I may venture to return. That time may be nearer than we suppose; every one tells me that nothing is easier than to forget, and to change one's mind, and turn one's

regard elsewhere ; and popular belief is supposed to be true. I can only say it is no belief of mine, and I am used to be considered sceptical. I have been to see my aunt and cousin, and you may expect them soon as neighbours. Stella sides with Roland and with you, so you need have no secrets with her. She is a fine creature spoiled, and I shall not forget her kindness to me in this trouble. I am going to Rome, and may take a long tour, so shall not burden my correspondents ; but I write to let you know that I have given instructions to my lawyer, whose address I enclose, to put himself in communication with Mr. Brudenell in the event of your marriage. Roland would not come and see me—perhaps it was as well. I was very near you both that evening. I prowled about your house for more than an hour—a pitiable object, no doubt, if you could have seen me, for envy and jealousy are not graceful ornaments, and my heart was gnawn by both. It is so still while I write, and I cannot consent to give you up, even though I know it will make little difference whether I do or not. God bless you, Marion, if I never see you again—perhaps the greatest blessing I could ask for you.

“ H. C.”

Through the tears caused by the first letter, it was difficult to decipher the smooth illegibility of the second. Stella wrote kindly, almost affectionately, congratulating Roland, and offering good wishes to herself ; and at the same time, expressing sympathy for the pain the family estrangement must have caused. She hoped she had talked poor Harcourt into a more reasonable mood, and her cousin and friend might rely on her good offices in inducing him to do something for them both. She had encouraged him to go abroad, as the best chance of recovering his spirits, promising to look after his people at Morlands meanwhile ; and they should lose no time in taking possession of the White House. Gervase Wray, who, by-the-bye, had engaged poor Mr. Saville's old servant as valet, had agreed to travel with him. Considering how sadly he was always out at elbows, you had

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no idea what a good fellow Gervase Wray was, when you wanted anything done. He had promised to let her know how Harcourt was, and give a general idea of his movements, and that was as much as they could hope for. A courteous message was added to Mr. Cecil Percival, and Stella was affectionately hers.

"She carries it off well," observed Mrs. Brudenell, to whom Marion read the letter. The same idea had occurred to herself; it was a relief to see that Miss Porchester took that frank, friendly tone, for she had rather dreaded a meeting. She was not sure that the writer meant all she said, but her having said it removed a great difficulty, and she did not hesitate to respond to the good will as she was expected to do. The Vicar, who had to go up to town to meet Mr. Saville on Marion's affairs, called on Harcourt's lawyer, to inquire into the arrangement referred to, but received no explanation—his instructions being to reserve it until the marriage of Miss Egerton.

The brothers had not met again, and Roland was hard at work in his office, and practising what he called rigid economy. As a preliminary step, he had sold out some hundreds of his small capital, and paid them into the hands of his brother's banker, for his immediate needs. Calling soon afterwards, he was informed that an account had already been opened there for him by Mr. Clarendon, who had placed five hundred pounds to his credit. Roland restrained himself before the civil cashier, but walked away swelling with indignation. He would keep his word, he would not touch a penny of Harcourt's money—he would sweep a crossing first. Instead of sweeping a crossing, however, he changed his expensive lodging, which Gervase had left him to occupy alone, for a bedroom of much humbler pretensions—dined cheaply off the joint, in the middle of the day, with some of his fellow-clerks; and denied himself all the small luxuries of cabs, orchestra stalls, and such-like, which, now he had to pay for them out of his own pocket, alarmed him by their cost. Not a "run" did he get all that season, and it was an unusually favourable one; it required the

comfort of Marion's letters three times a week, to keep this privation from pressing sorely on his spirits. At Christmas he got a few days' leave, and Mr. Percival would have mounted him, but his pride rebelled, and he declined. At Easter, which fell early, he tried for leave again, and failed, as his betters had to be served first; but by way of compensation, a branch of the Egertons, living in London, found out that they had a kinswoman still unknown, and wrote so pressingly to invite Marion for a visit, her uncle and aunt could not but persuade her to accept it. Roland was speedily introduced to these hospitable people, and requested to come whenever he pleased, which, he soon showed them, meant every day. Mrs. Lyndsay, hearing of this, came to make Marion's acquaintance also; and among them all Miss Egerton was in a fair way of seeing a little more of the world than she had hitherto done. The change was seasonable, for the White House had proved a poor substitute for Morlands, and notwithstanding all Stella's civilities, she could never feel that she was really her friend. Little things would come up unawares, that betrayed the existence of greater; and Marion's instinct, which rarely failed her, gave warnings she could not put aside and forget.

Her engagement to the man she dearly loved had met with slight obstacles in its formation, but it had been formed under circumstances nearly as trying as if it had been authoritatively deferred. It was not till this spring, removed from everything that could remind her of the calamity she had unwittingly caused, and exhilarated by the novelty and amusement of her cousins' mode of life, that she could be said, in any way, to realise the happiness of being loved. But even now it was disturbed by anxiety; her presence, instead of soothing Roland, seemed to unsettle him completely; he grew wild with impatience to make her his own, and keep her in London altogether. He pestered Mrs. Lyndsay with his confidences, till she told him she was afraid to see him come in; he besieged the General, he haunted Sir Perkin, talking them both nearly dead, but making them listen perforce—and at last

fairly extracted a promise either of the secretaryship, the moment it should fall vacant, or of a rise, as soon as it was possible to give him one. How to get rid of the invalid secretary, who stuck to his post and his salary with a tenacity worthy of a better cause, was a difficulty ; and Roland soon began to look upon him as an incarnation of selfishness, whom it would be a boon to society to remove at once. A feverish dread had taken hold upon him, that if his marriage were delayed, Harcourt would in some manner prevent its ever taking place. Every instance he had known of his obduracy of purpose, formerly either told as a good story, or fretted at as one frets at a passing grievance, assumed a threatening aspect now. That drive from the station, when he reminded him “he was master”—the sale of the horses, and dismissal of the groom, against Stella’s petition and his own—the favour into which he had taken the vagrant Trail, in opposition to the opinion of the whole house—these were all traits of the determination not to give up his own will, which was his brother’s characteristic whenever he chose to exert that will at all. And if he had resolved, sooner or later, to defeat Roland’s object, what chance should he have ? He was beginning to think of Harcourt as an enemy lying in wait ; and his nights were made wretched by alternations of feeling, from bitter regret for his lost affection, to equally bitter resentment for the manner in which he had been thrown off.

His cousin, Mrs. Lyndsay, was not long in discovering his state ; and having made a few inquiries in other quarters, with her father’s approval took upon herself to give Miss Egerton a little bold advice.

“ Depend upon it, my dear, there are times and seasons when a piece of imprudence, at the right moment, is the perfection of wisdom. We all know it is a foolish thing to marry on too small an income, as it is a very hazardous thing to take arsenic or prussic acid—but as these sometimes effect a cure, when milder measures fail, so may that, judiciously applied. I am very impertinent, I am afraid ; but even impertinence is not without its utility. I have seen a good deal of the world, and you have only seen a small corner of it, and I am

convinced nothing is more dangerous for a young man like Roland, than to be left in London in this unsettled, restless, unhappy state. While you are always at hand, he is comparatively safe ; but when he has that resource no longer, he will grow sick of his work, and crave excitement as a protection from unpleasant thoughts ; and he is just the good-humoured, agreeable fellow who would be the soonest led into mischief. Take my advice, and marry him without delay, and make a wedding tour in Italy ; and if you do not contrive to meet brother Harcourt, and win him over, you will not be the clever woman I take you for—in fact, you will hardly be a woman at all. Those two cannot be happy long apart, and they will never come together without help ; they will both resist at first, and both bless you for ever, when you have reunited them. Think it well over when I am gone, and act accordingly."

Marion did think it over, and the result of her meditations was, that she wrote to Mrs. Brudenell, and laid the case before her. She had no fear of poverty—she was ready to economise and contrive, and do without anything they could not afford, if only Roland might be saved from temptation. She did not say from what bitter experience she had derived that dread, which rarely mingles with the plans of youth, but her uncle and aunt needed no such explanation. They knew all she meant, better, perhaps, than she intended they should ; they talked the whole case over with heavy hearts, but steadfast courage ; they looked into their accounts, they drew up a balance-sheet of receipt and expenditure, and calculated to a nicety where retrenchment was possible and where it was not ; and at last Mrs. Brudenell made a proposal, to which, after considerable difficulty, she prevailed on her husband to consent. This was, that the three thousand pounds of which Marion had been robbed by her step-father, should be replaced out of the little fortune which the Vicar had with pains and toil accumulated by literary labour, and which, besides an insurance on his life, was all his wife would have to support her in the event of his death. It would come to her in the

course of nature, as their adopted daughter, her aunt argued ; and if she ever did want a home, Roland and Marion would give her one—she was not afraid. In short, she was so earnest, even to tears, that Julian could not hold out, and she was empowered to write back as follows :

“ MY DARLING CHILD,—You are quite right, and we both love you the more for your openness and sincerity. Your uncle has a little plan, by which true love may be made to run a little smoother than it otherwise would, and when you have persuaded Roland to have you, he will write to him on the subject. Our one wish is for the happiness of our two children.”

Whether Roland required much persuasion, may be left to be imagined. Mrs. Lyndsay waylaid him on his way from the office, and primed him to strike the iron while it was hot ; promising, on her part, to do all that woman could, to induce Mr. Cromer, the inconvenient secretary, either to resign or die. Miss Egerton’s relations were all for the marriage taking place as soon as possible, and from their house ; and in Roland’s present state of mind, a proposal that offered an escape from the sight of Morlands—from the spectral gap that Harcourt’s absence must cause at the altar and at the feast—was almost as deep a cause for gratitude as the generosity of Mr. Brudenell, or the spirited interference of Florence Lyndsay. Marion saw it was so, and from her the wish passed on to her indulgent friends, and, as a matter of course, they gave up their own, and instead of a quiet wedding in their own church, among their own people, consented to the fatigue and expense of coming up to London. Miss Porchester was to be one of the bridesmaids—she took a lively interest in the whole proceeding, and between her and Mrs. Lyndsay, the bride was hardly allowed to have a voice in her own trousseau, except in the matter of expense. There they found she could be obstinate ; and wisely refrained from wasting their influence. Leave of absence was obtained for Roland, and furnished apartments bespoken for the young pair on

their return from their continental tour, the funds for which were General Alexander's wedding gift. They had private information from Stella as to Harcourt's whereabouts, and were full of hope of a speedy reunion. Let them only find him, and it would not be their fault if they did not win him back.

"I have not touched a farthing of his money," said Roland ; "there are his five hundred pounds, just as he left them. Till we have shaken hands, I should consider it a disgrace."

This was said the day before the marriage, before he had heard the settlements. He had been the first to insist, rather grandly, that Marion's fortune should be settled on herself; he was not prepared to be told by his own family lawyer, who attended on the occasion, that Harcourt had charged the Morlands estate with an annuity to Marion Egerton of three hundred a year for life, from the day of her marriage—payable in advance half yearly, and entirely at her own disposal.

"You will not touch it—you would not wish to do so, Marion?" he asked, almost resentfully.

"Not till we bring him back to stay with us," was her reply. "We shall want it then, for he is nearly as particular as you are."

"You talk as if you were sure of finding him."

"I feel so ; I shall never be happy till I have made him some amends. He might resist us separately, but we shall be too strong for him together."

Everything was settled, everything was ready. Percival came up to be present at the ceremony, looking more worn and hollow-eyed than ever ; unable to keep away from Stella's side, and yet evidently suffering whenever he was there. That winter had been a torturing time for him, and the spring brought but little comfort. All the wisdom, and learning, and knowledge of human nature, of which he had been so proud, failed to teach him how to deal with the heart of such a woman ; and he was, in fact, powerless in the light hands, that soothed one day and irritated another, and found solace in suspense and disappointment to herself by inflicting them on him. She had

beauty of nature. They had been here now two or three days, and Wray had contrived to exist, with the help of the table d'hôte, theatre, and écarté; and, being of a philosophic temperament, was contented to remain, so long as he had nothing to pay. He humoured his friend in every whim, and bore with his changing moods as no one else, perhaps, would have done, for it was no easy task. As they turned down the Allée on the present occasion, Harcourt suddenly stopped short. "I shall go a little way by myself now, Gervase; I will meet you again in an hour or two," he said, and struck off to the left, secure that his companion would not even wish to follow, when he saw where he was going.

There was another watching him, however, who had fewer scruples where he followed, to compass his ends; and as the young man entered the cemetery, a dark, stealthy figure was not many paces behind, though keeping back till a favourable opportunity should offer. Unconscious of being observed, Harcourt strode on, a little perplexed at first in finding what he sought, for changes are rapid in God's acre, and the army of crosses had moved an encampment farther since he saw them last. The keeper of the cemetery, however, helped him to recollect the spot, and pointed out the resting-place of Mr. Saville with some pride, as many English had asked to see it. His end had made quite a sensation; only, with a significant jerk of his thumb, one did not talk much about it down there. He had kept it tidy and clean, but there was no one in the place to give any orders, and to hang wreaths upon it now. Oh, the gentleman was too good—pocketing Harcourt's gratuity—and it should be under his special care, if he wished it. Perhaps he would like to gather a leaf as a souvenir of his dear friend?

"I have a more lasting one about me," was the Englishman's answer; and, when left to himself, he stood with his arms leaning on the iron rails, gazing down on the stone, with feelings against which it could ill protect the dead.

"And they are to be married," he thought, "and all will be over; and *he* must have known, when he told me that lie, what a lie it was. His man's evidence is con-

clusive ; he played his last card, and played it well, and had he lived he might have won the stakes. I was a blind fool, ready to be deceived ; and she, poor innocent child—what was she in his hands ? She could no more have resisted his manœuvres for her establishment than for her ruin. And it has come to this, and he lies there, and no revenge of mine could touch him, if I would. Forgive him ? Yes—I may come to that too, at last, when I have sunk down to his level ; till then, all the misery he has caused be on his head—blasting him, even in the grave ! ”

“ A fine evening, sir,” said a voice, in tolerable English, as he walked back to the gate. “ I thought I could not mistake the chivalrous friend of my poor George. You have shed a tear to his memory—he had many who mourned him, and I was one.”

“ So you were—I remember you now. Monsieur Le—Le—I beg your pardon.”

“ Lepelletier, sir. I am honoured by your remembrance. It is early for Baden ; you are passing through, I presume.”

“ As I am through this gate ; here to-day, and gone to-morrow, as our classic writer has expressed it. You are acquainted with the English classics, M. Lepelletier ? ”

“ If I am ? The immortal Williams, and *cette pauvre petite* Jane Eyre, and *les mystères de Londres*—ah, your literature is fine, ver fine, and your streets are full of melodramas that you have but to portray, and our blood freezes in our veins. I was in Londres once, once only—I shall never forget it. Dark, dark, all day long. Ah, it is a grand place to forge, and to work with steam, and to make money ; but for *le plaisir*, there is no place like Paris, hein ? Monsieur Clarendon knows Paris ? ”

“ And the Parisians, M. Lepelletier ; especially those we have the honour to meet in German watering-places.”

“ Monsieur is pleasant ; I have the honour to wish him good evening.”

And so they parted, and when, that evening, the friends went to the Opera, he was there soon after them, and

wherever they walked next day he met them by accident. A strange whim seized Harcourt to encourage his advances, and try his strength with his own weapons ; and, whether for the sake of excitement, or to provoke Gervase to remonstrate, invited him into their sitting-room, and let himself be persuaded to play a few rubbers of *écarté*, losing seventy or eighty francs in the course of the evening, the stakes being considered moderate. The next day he sent for Lepelletier before twelve o'clock, and played with him again—played till dinner-time, and after dinner, till ten. The Frenchman's pockets, by this time, were beginning to feel rather comfortable ; Gervase Wray was growing fidgety—Auguste kept him on the rack with stories of his old master's experience under this same professor. Going up to bed that night, Harcourt had some difficulty in obtaining the services of his *protégé*, Trail, and the moment he looked at him perceived he was not sober.

"What do you mean by this behaviour, sir?" he asked. "Have I not told you that you have all the rest of your time to indulge in your favourite iniquity, but that you must be without reproach when you appear before me?"

"I am as free from reproach as yourself," retorted Trail. "If the master gambles, the man may drink. *That* for your gentlemanly little virtues!" And, snapping his fingers in Clarendon's face, he found himself the next minute flying out into the passage.

No apology was offered next day ; Trail was in a direful mood of sullen wrath, and Auguste warned Harcourt that he did not like his looks. Harcourt sent for him, told him, if he caught him drunk again, he should strip the coat off his back, have him pumped upon by the waiters, and sent off about his business ; and not a word did he elicit in reply. That evening passed like the former, Harcourt losing nearly every game. Gervase began to grow desperate, and was sitting up later than usual, inditing a letter to Stella on the subject, when his friend came in, and threw himself on a chair by his side.

"Wray, I have had my fling, and tasted the pleasures of gambling, if that may be called such which is confined

to losing your money. Now I am going to try something fresh. Get up at five to-morrow, and we will have a tramp through the Black Forest."

"Why at five?" asked Gervase, disconsolately.

"Because I am not going to bed, and that is as long as I can wait. Are you not in good training at present?"

"Not very; I am a little lame still." He had had a slight sprain a few weeks ago, and gladly seized upon its shelter.

"So you are, poor fellow—as lame as a tree when occasion serves you. Do you know why a tree is lame? Because it has but one leg, and that is a wooden one. Not bad, is it? Well, look here, by way of amendment, suppose we do this. I shall start at daybreak, with Claude Melnotte, in light marching order, and walk through the forest to Wildbad; and you can take a trap the next day, and join me there—dine and sleep, and come back the day after. Will that suit you?"

Anything suited Gervase Wray that kept Harcourt amused without the assistance of Lepelletier; and the boon was cheaply purchased by the bore of a day's drive through nothing but scenery. He tore up his unfinished letter, and went to bed; and though his morning slumbers were broken by a good deal of shouting, and running, and ringing of bells, did not think it necessary to get up to wish his friend good-bye. Auguste reported, when he came in with his master's hot water, that Mr. Clarendon had gone off as he proposed, but that Trail was found so very hard to wake, having indulged in an extra cup overnight, that Monsieur, after raging and fuming for half an hour, declared he would not wait, and he must follow him. Monsieur would breakfast at Gernsbach, and Trail must join him there. Was the fellow gone? Oh yes—in such a temper! Auguste would be sorry, he vowed, to be at his mercy that morning. He had his master's pistols with him—he only hoped he would quarrel with no one on the road. The people of the hotel confirmed this account; they shrugged their shoulders as they spoke of the English valet—*un mauvais garnement*, as the head-waiter

pronounced him to be, who had sworn at him for remonstrating at his calling for a quantity of brandy just before starting, besides having his flask filled for the journey. He would be in plenty of time for his master, as M. Lepelletier had gone also for a little excursion that morning, and had offered to carry him as far as Gernsbach in his carriage.

"He has gone on Harcourt's track," thought Gervase, more interested in this last piece of information than in the former, and he promised his friend no peace until he should have got him safely out of his reach. When the carriage came back in the afternoon without bringing Lepelletier, only a message that he might be absent one night, or two, Wray grew very uncomfortable. "Have a good pair of horses put to and at the door at eight, and mind you are ready," was his last order to Auguste before going to bed. He felt as if he should not be easy in his mind till he had seen Harcourt, and he was actually waiting to start before his conveyance was ready. The beauty of the drive was lost on him, and when he reached the hotel at Wildbad, where they were to meet, he eagerly inquired if an English gentleman and his servant had yet arrived. No English gentleman had come yet; but, as nobody was there, it was opined, anybody might arrive any minute. Gervase ordered dinner, looked at the rooms, lighted a cigar, and tried to be easy, but could not rest a moment. He sent Auguste out to reconnoitre; Auguste returned with a strange report that an English man-servant, answering Trail's description, had passed through the place—had been seen by several persons—had made inquiries about routes and distances, bought some provisions, and gone on, as he said, by his master's orders. How long was this ago? In the morning.

It sounded unlikely, and yet it made Wray uneasy. How that uneasiness increased when the night came on, without bringing any further intelligence of master or man, may be imagined. He did not attempt to go to bed, and as soon as it was day, called up the landlord, and explained his apprehensions, desiring that guides

might be provided to accompany him in the search for his friend, to whom he had begun to fear some accident must have happened. Notice was also given to the local police, and a mounted gendarme sent off in pursuit of the individual who had passed through the previous morning.

The road by which the pedestrians were to have come was impassable in a carriage, and Gervase had to forget his sprain ; indeed, anxiety would have driven it from his mind at any rate. A long, fatiguing walk it was to him, and for some time, without affording any clue to Harcourt's non-appearance. At last, a woodcutter was found, who remembered seeing a man pass in the cap and coat, courier bag, and knapsack, with which Trail had started from Baden. He remembered it, because, when he had greeted the stranger, according to custom, instead of answering, he had thrown him a handful of kreutzers. Trail then had surely passed that way, but where had he left his master ? On they went, inquiring of every peasant they met, until another man deposed to having seen two strangers yesterday whose description agreed with that of Harcourt and his servant, at the forester's lodge, a mile or two farther, where one of them was asking the nearest way to the Wild-See. He had heard the hostess describe the path, and believed the stranger took it. The servant, as he remembered that they all observed, seemed to be grumbling at having to go farther, and looked very sulky and savage ; but his master only laughed at his laziness, and would not allow him to have more than one chopine of beer.

In return for this evidence, the man was pressed into their service at once, as additional guide ; and with his help they at last found the path to one of those deep, dark, lonely mountain tarns, to which German fancy loves to attach the interest of legend and fairy fable, so rapidly disappearing even from these their favourite shrines. And here a trace was found again—a battered hat, and a mud-stained glove, both recognised as Harcourt Clarendon's. Traces of a struggle were discernible for several yards, where the soft soil was torn up as with the

fet of wrestlers, and here and there were dark blood-stains, as if a wounded person had either walked or been dragged along to the water's edge. And that was all ; and when Gervase wrote, their utmost exertions had failed to discover anything more. He had offered large rewards—the police were on the track of the fugitive, and he could only wait now for Roland's assistance and authority.

He had not long to wait ; as soon as steam could bring him, Roland arrived, accompanied by Percival and Harcourt's lawyer, having travelled without stopping or breaking his fast. The first stunning effect of the blow having passed, his grief and remorse could only find relief in the fierce energy with which he threw himself upon the track of the assassin. The calm, deliberate routine of German police in vain opposed its passive resistance ; everything gave way before his passionate vehemence and profuse offers of reward, and the whole country rang with the tale of the murder, and versions of the supposed circumstances. The weather was very hot, and Roland was incessantly in the sun, resting neither night nor day, and heeding neither warning nor entreaty ; and before his investigations had been productive of any result, he was prostrated with an illness that brought him to the brink of the grave. Marion had consented to remain behind when her presence might have been a hindrance, but at the first intimation of his danger she hastened to assume her rights ; and he was often calling for her by name, unaware that she was by his side.

The search went on meanwhile ; a certain amount of suspicion had attached itself to M. Lepelletier, who on his return to Baden at the time he had appointed, was at once apprehended for examination by the police. His statement, however, tallied with what had been previously ascertained. He had met Mr. Clarendon at Gernsbach, and breakfasted with him ; and observed at the time that his servant was in a very sulky humour, increased by his master's ridicule—and the Frenchman had thought afterwards he would as soon have chosen Mephistopheles for a companion through the Black Forest. He had parted

from them early in the day, and knew nothing more, nor could anything more be extracted from him. He was discharged accordingly, and quitted Baden, and the day he did so, the news was brought to the English party that a body had been discovered and conveyed to the town, which they were required to identify. Roland was then at the worst, so the painful task fell on Gervase and Percival. How painful it had been, Marion could read in their ghastly faces when they returned—faces that told her more than she had courage to ask, or they to speak of. Percival, indeed, could not speak at all, only wrung her hand, and hurried to his room, where he locked himself in for some hours; nor was it till after Gervase had given vent to more honest tears than he had shed for many a day, that he could give her any particulars.

Actual identification he told her, had been impossible; the remains had been found partially consumed under a pile of half-charred logs, and the features were entirely obliterated, but proofs of the sad reality were not wanting. The body, stripped of its clothes, was swathed from head to foot in a large fine plaid of Harcourt's; and a seal ring had been found in its folds, which Gervase and Percival both recognised as constantly worn by their lost friend. The police seemed perfectly satisfied of the identity on hearing this—and no difficulty would be made about the interment. The whole thing, Mr. Wray confessed, had been too much for him—if it had not been for Percival, he could not have gone near the place; but Percival went through it all without flinching, being more used to such sad sights, and feeling them less at the time—however much they might tell on him afterwards.

A few mornings later there was another English funeral in Baden; and not very far from the monument of George Saville was planted a cross bearing the name of Harcourt Clarendon of Morlands. Later in the day, a French Abbé, who had become slightly acquainted with the party from being at the same hotel, passing through the cemetery, saw Percival standing by the new-made grave in an attitude of such utter dejection, that he stopped to

offer comfort, and say a few courteous words about the untimely fate of one so full of promise.

"It will not be offering an insult to your belief, I trust," he added, softly, "if I offer to remember him in my prayers."

Rather to his surprise, for a few sharp passes had already been exchanged between them on matters of belief, in which he had found the Englishman a ready master of fence, Percival grasped his hand in both his. "God reward you tenfold," he said, "for every prayer you put up to Him for the soul of Harcourt Clarendon!"

He turned to hide his emotion, and the kind-hearted Abbé felt it would be intrusive to remain. He passed on to leave the cemetery, but in so doing an impulse made him look back. The English clergyman was on his knees by the grave, and his face hidden in his hands.

"An interesting case, a very interesting case; plainly a convert to the truth, only waiting a gentle bidding to throw himself into our arms," thought the good man. "These English will be angels at last, if they will only lay aside their insular prejudices."

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW MASTER AT MORLANDS.

TWO years had passed, and a third summer had just begun, and once more were the roses blooming in the cottage gardens of Stourbrooke, and perfuming the air that floated in at the open windows of the White House. At one of those windows is Stella seated, her work in her hand, though any one who had watched its progress would have found it as stationary as that of the Zegri lady in the song. As she lifts her face a moment, to listen for the twentieth time for an expected step, we may notice that it is altered for the worse since we saw it last. Her bloom is a little faded, and there is a weary, dissatisfied expression on her brow and lip, that is a fatal

foe to beauty. Her thoughts, when alone, must have been but sorry company, for impatient gestures escaped her as if some irritating remark had just been made, and at last she gave up the pretence of occupation, and throwing aside her embroidery, leaned back in her chair with a long, restless sigh.

A step came at last, and she roused herself, with an assumption of cheerful indifference as her mother came in. "Well, mamma ! I began to give you up altogether."

" Well you might, my dear ; I really could not tear myself away sooner. The sweetest little baby you ever saw—quite took to me directly, and I had to rock her, and carry her about for nearly half an hour, till I was ready to drop, to stop her crying. The very picture of Roland, and, indeed, of Marion too, as I told them, and of course they were both delighted, and she is going on sweetly, as she always does, let what will happen. I always do say she is the best-tempered young creature I ever came across, and I ought to be a judge, at my time of life."

" So you ought, mamma, and if she is not good tempered, with everything this world can give her, I do not know who should be. I dare say I could be as amiable myself under as favourable circumstances."

" So you are, my dear Stella—quite amiable enough, I am sure, as you have not a husband and baby to care about, and a great place to look after, and all that. It really did me good, do you know, to see poor Roland look like himself again. I have not heard him laugh, as he did when I said the child was a picture of them both, for many a long day. I am sure I have talked and talked to his wife about it, till we have both agreed we could not bear to talk any more, and I quite despaired of his coming round at all, and said so—but this baby has put new life into him, and I am sure he was gratified by my seeing the likeness. Young fathers always are. I said I was afraid its being only a girl was a great disappointment, and he told me I ought to be ashamed of myself, considering my experience of what a daughter could be."

"Much he knew about the matter," said Stella, with a slight smile.

"No, very true; he could know nothing at all, but I thought it very pretty of him to say it, and indeed, I always say, no mother was ever more fortunate than I am, in having an only daughter, and being able to keep her so long. I used to think I should be left alone, years and years ago."

Miss Porchester had taken up her work again, and was stitching away in real earnest.

"Did you have a word with him on business, mamma?"

"No, really, I could not bring myself to talk about money, just when we were all so comfortable. It always makes me nervous to talk about money when I want it, and I thought I would wait, or leave it to you."

"We have waited a long time already, mamma."

"I know we have, my dear, and so have those tiresome people, by their own accounts, who are always teasing for their bills. I am sure I don't want to owe them anything if I could only pay them, and they go on worrying, just as if it was one's fault, and not one's misfortune. Stella, have you made up your mind yet about Gervase Wray's letter?"

"Not yet."

"Then, indeed, you must begin, for it is not using him well, and you must remember he is the worst hand in the world at making money go far, and while you are hesitating about it, he will be spending all his legacy, that might make you so comfortable. I do think it was very handsome of him to come forward directly he had anything to offer, even if it was not quite so much as you could wish. I always liked Gervase Wray, he is so good natured and civil; and I am sure I wish him well."

"So do I," said Stella.

"Then, my dear, why don't you accept him?"

"Perhaps for that very reason."

"Oh, if you are going to talk in that strange way, I have done. I never understand you in those odd humours. I only know we cannot go on much longer as

we are now, and if you won't do anything to help us out of the difficulty, who will?"

"Do not be down-hearted, mamma; you may get rid of me yet, if that is what you want, but I must have time to think it over."

She took up a grey hat and feather from the sofa, and putting it on her head, went out into the little garden.

The noble woods of Morlands park, glorious in all their first verdure, had been the favourite object of view when she chose this house as a residence; since then they had long been a grievous eyesore, and yet she stood and gazed at them now, as if their fascination were irresistible. She thought of her past life, her ambition, her hopes, her expectations, all the energy she had expended in carrying her point with every one, and compassing her ends, as she felt she had a right to do—and what had been the result of all? That she was growing older, with fewer friends, fewer attractions, and the want of money pinching her in every direction. Their small income had never been sufficient for the expenditure she chose to think essential, and every year had only increased their difficulties, until they had become a very serious matter. Here they actually were, harassed by dressmakers, and upholsterers, and livery-stablemen, for their long-standing bills; and there—her heart sickened with envy, in spite of her better self—there lay Morlands stretched before her, with all its prosperity and wealth—and the possessor of all that she had looked on as her own, was her rival, Marion. How little she had dreamed of this when she saw her first, when she nursed her in her illness, when she took Roland's rose up to her room, really liking her well enough for a sister-in-law, and intending to be kind and patronising to her when she was. And she had aided and abetted her marriage, as the surest method of securing herself from the possibility of rivalry—and all for this, to find herself requiring help from Marion's husband, and to be debating whether prudence did not require her to become the wife of Gervase Wray.

"People may well say it is a vexatious and weary world," she sighed to herself, aloud. "I am sure I am

quite tired of it, only I am not fit for a better, so I have to make the most of this."

A shadow fell across her path as the murmur escaped her lips, and she turned to greet Cecil Percival.

"Welcome back at last! I hope your holiday has done you good."

"Thank you; I hope so too. At any rate, my uncle's kind intention was the same." He took off his hat, and pushed the hair back from his forehead. He too was changed, and much more so than his companion. His eyes were sunken, and his cheeks transparent; and indeed his strength had so much failed that he had been compelled to give up pastoral duty, and nurse himself; and his uncle had insisted on his trying a continental journey, from which he had just returned.

"You have an inviting bench there, under the shade," he said; "may I sit down for a few minutes?"

They sat down together accordingly, Stella looking at Morlands, and Cecil at Stella.

"You have heard the terrible news," she began, gravely.

He trembled violently. "No—I have heard none—what? Where?"

"At Morlands—a girl, instead of a boy. Dear me, how I have frightened you. I really beg your pardon for my weak attempt at a joke; it was only because Roland was so eager for an heir, that he seemed to think the world would stand still without it."

"It is better as it is," said the curate, drawing a long breath, and trying to regain his composure.

"Of course we all know that, and he seems quite content. His cup is full to overflowing now."

"It seems so to us," said Cecil.

"Seems? It is. He has all he can wish for, and so has she. If one did not sometimes indulge in a little envy out loud, I think one would be tempted to do them a little mischief secretly."

"You envy them, then, Miss Porchester?"

"Now and then; at this present moment I consider my friend Mrs. Clarendon the happiest of mortals."

"Perhaps she is. Poor thing—she has had, I will not say enough of trouble, for that we know nothing about—but enough in her life to make her present happiness very sweet. Poor thing!"

"So you are going to pity her because she is happier than she was—what will you do for me?"

"Is that your case?"

"Exactly, only reversed. I am not at all happy, and I am in a great perplexity."

"Can I help you in it?"

"I do not know; I am afraid no one can help me. I have come to the painful conviction that I am a failure. Do not tell me I am mistaken, for I know you found it out long since."

His head drooped, and as he sat, clasping his hands absently round his knee, he seemed musing on her words.

"Failure—failure. Yes, it is the discipline of life, and it must be good for us, but it tries us as by fire. I know what it is, and can therefore feel for you, though I do not know how it is to be remedied. Failure, with every help, and every inducement, and such a prize in view, is only not hopeless because we are not alone. No, God be thanked, we are not alone!"

Her eyes turned on him inquiringly; his sadness had a degree of humility in its tone, which she had never observed before. And now she noticed that, thin as he had always been, he was becoming emaciated, and streaks of premature silver were visible in his hair. Almost forgetting herself and her troubles, she asked, with some solicitude, if he were suffering in health more than usual? She feared he had been doing too much, busying himself for the good of others, and neglecting his own. Now he was come back he must take more care, for the sake of those who cared about him. And her looks implied more than her words, not unobserved by him, whose cheek flushed a moment, and then grew pale again.

"It is very kind of you to say so—very kind of any one to care for me," he replied, slowly and guardedly; "and I know it is my duty to do the best for myself, so

as to have strength for my work. That is all I have to live for now, and for that I must try to live."

"It is not all you have to live for," she said, passionately; "no one has a right to say that who has made friends as you have, unless you consider they are to be thrown by when you are tired of them. If that is the case, I have nothing more to say."

"You know it is not," he said, calmly.

"I know nothing whatever, but that you have altered very much, and that one might as well look for sympathy from a stone wall. I had half a mind to ask for some advice on an affair that worries me, and which I should be glad to talk over with a disinterested friend."

"That is just what I am not," he said, rising in agitation. "I can never be disinterested where you are concerned; and the only advice I should dare to give, would be that you should do what you felt to be right—right only. Never give up your peace of mind in the vain belief that it is required of you, either for yourself or for another."

He touched her hand a moment, and was gone, leaving her in a tumult of feelings, which she could not, or durst not, attempt to analyse.

What his own were could only have been conjectured by any one who saw the look of patient anguish with which he pursued his way along the familiar road to his old parish of Durningham. Two years ago, he thought nothing of the walk, but it was a painful exertion now, and when he rang at the Rectory door, he was fain to lean against the wall for support. The maid who answered the summons was pretty Susan Smiles, who started and blushed at the sight of him, and was only deterred by shyness from stammering a welcome. He held out his hand kindly, and retained hers while he asked after her parents, and her health, and her comfort in service. All seemed to be as heart could wish; father and mother was purely, she thanked him, and missis very kind, and gave her a day out whenever she could. And how was Ned Bridges? Oh, he was quite well, she believed—she had not seen him for ever so long—not since Sunday,

when he walked home with her—mother said he might, you know, sir, and father too—Mr. Clarendon was very good to Ned, and gave him plenty of work ; he was saving a deal of money.

“ I am glad to hear it, Susan. And you, too, are saving, I hope, and not spending everything as fast as you get it.”

“ Oh no, sir, I have three pounds in the savings-bank already, and missis says I ought to have ten before I—I—I mean——”

“ Before you marry. No doubt she is right, but it cannot be done without self-denial, mind that. You have been very tenderly dealt with, Susan, and ought to be very grateful.”

“ Indeed, sir,” her eyes flashing through tears, “ I never would have cared for a wretch who could do such a thing as *he* did—I’d tear him in pieces if he ever came near me, and Ned knows it.”

“ He will not come near you, you need not fear,” said the curate, after a little pause, “ and we may leave him to his Judge, Susan. It is not for us to condemn our brother.”

“ But the Squire, sir, the master, who was so kind to everybody”—Susan was sobbing now unrestrainedly—“ it was only that Michaelmas he had had the roof new thatched, and the floor mended, and everything made tight at father’s, and not a penny of rent raised ; sent them down a cock and two hens from his poultry-yard, because mother’s had died off ; and gave me a half-a-sovereign, his own self, when I went to service—so kind when he gave it, he made me cry. And to think that that wretch, whom he picked up in his rags, and every one here speaks ill on, should have been his death, and that I should be thought to have cared for him—oh ! oh ! ”

Susan could stand out no longer, and fled to finish her cry in the kitchen. The curate pressed his clenched hand to his heart ; it was beating painfully and wearily, and he was sick and faint. He moved on to the parlour door, and very nearly stumbled into Miss Holmby’s arms, who was just coming out.

" Dear heart alive, Mr. Cecil, and it is you ! If I did not think it was Ned Bridges gossiping with Susan ! You know she is allowed to see him at proper times, on condition he does not come without leave, and I was going to give them both such a dressing for breaking rules—and it was you all the time ! How tired you look ! Bless me, you have not grown a bit stouter for your holiday—no wonder, for I'll be bound you never tasted butcher's meat, at least what I should call meat, from the time you left England till the time you came back. Wishy-washy soups, and cabbages, and garlic, and sour bread—I know all about it, and you are just starved. Well now, what will you take ? We have a delicious ham in cut, and a cold pie, with savoury jelly, and Susan will put you down a chop in a minute—and by the time you have had your mouthful, the Rector will be in. He is gone to a vestry, and you know he will want something pleasant after that."

Percival smiled faintly, and yielded without resistance to the kind force that put him in possession of the easiest arm-chair ; he made no protest against luncheon, and even took with avidity the glass of wine that was brought in as a preliminary step. His meekness almost alarmed his hospitable entertainer. She could not remember that he had ever accepted sherry at odd hours before, without the help of Brady and Tate. It was an opportunity not to be lost, and she slipped out to give orders for the immediate packing up of a goodly hamper, of which the cold pie and savoury jelly should form a part ; and that the pony-carriage should be ready, when wanted, to take Mr. Percival back to Stourbrooke. A couple of chops were to be cooked instantly, not too much done, and brought in as hot as possible ; and some new-laid eggs, and freshly churned butter, put up to go with the hamper. Then she hurried back to her guest, who was leaning back in his chair with half-closed eyes.

" And now tell us all about it—what you have been doing with yourself, and what news you have brought. Did you hear anything of that miserable man ?"

" Nothing."

"I dare say you inquired, though, when you were not looking at churches and paintings."

"I went for no other purpose; I found no object of equal interest; it was more to me than churches or paintings. Once I thought I was on his traces, but I never was."

"Are the police out there still on the look-out? The Rector says they wear all kinds of foolish uniforms; I should not have much opinion of a policeman in uniform."

"Even with that disadvantage," said he, with a faint smile, "the promised reward ensures their watchfulness. On the slightest clue being given, they will telegraph to the police in London, and from them we should hear directly—we may be sure of that."

"Well, I only wish it could be cleared up—not that I am of a bloodthirsty disposition, but for the sake of that dear Mr. Roland, whom I remember in petticoats, and a terrible pickle he used to be. It quite went to one's heart to see him so cut up, and if it had not been that his sweet little wife knew how to manage him, I don't know what would have been the end of it—I don't, indeed. I believe he still keeps all his poor brother's private rooms locked up, and lets no one but the house-keeper go in to dust, and make them clean, and put everything back just as he left it. He can hardly bear to hear his name mentioned even now."

"I can understand that," said Cecil, shivering, as if with cold, in spite of the sunshine that streamed through the closed window. "I feel the same myself. Do not talk of him any more, there's a dear woman."

"Why, he was never a particular friend of yours, was he?"

"If he had been, I do not think I should have been alive now to answer you."

"It is as much as you are; I never saw any one so starved in all my days. You have never been well since you went up for the Clarendons' wedding, and had that journey at a moment's notice. Well, now they will be a bit more cheerful, and so, I hope, will you. Mrs.

Clarendon is doing sweetly, I hear, and the little girl a perfect beauty. I went over to ask all about it of Mrs. Brudenell, and she told me it had come like a good angel to the house, bringing them a message of peace. Those were her very words, quite like a bit out of the Vicar's last sermon. There was no reason why they should reproach themselves, but they did, and though they were spending hundreds of pounds in doing good where their poor brother spent one, they seemed to think they had no right to be there, and were not worthy to stand in his room. You should hear your uncle talk of Roland Clarendon—he says he wishes there were a dozen such in the county, and he gives you the credit of a good deal. Now it is of no use for you to be shaking your head, and groaning for all the world like Aaron Brown, the Methodist class-leader ; you know your uncle is not given to over-praising anybody—never said a flattering thing to me in my life—and he did think it better you should go to Stourbrooke, as you may remember. And he told me only last week that he thought the influence you had over young men was something wonderful, and that if Roland Clarendon turns out a higher specimen of the Christian gentleman than his brother, it will be greatly owing to his friendship with you. There, I won't vex you any more. Dear, dear, how poorly you do seem ! I must just go and see if that mutton-chop is not ready ; and if you would only condescend to take a short sleep meanwhile, it would do you twice as much good."

"Sleep !" murmured Cecil, as his well-meaning friend left him alone, "when shall I ever sleep quietly again, till I too am in my grave ? O God, if I have done wrong, how can I now go back ?"

It was, indeed, a summer-time of happiness that had come to the Hall and the Vicarage with Marion's little daughter, acknowledged by all authorities in both places to be such a daughter as no parents had ever been blessed with before. Nobody thought of regretting she was anything but what she was ; her small self was the

abridgment of all that was perfect in humanity, and the young mother, as in the tranquil days of convalescence she lay on her sofa watching Roland make his first essay in nursing—so anxious and painstaking, so proud of his own skill, so solemn and serious under his burden, until he happened to catch his wife's eye, when the old glad smile broke over both their faces—could hardly believe she had ever known what it was to have an aching heart. And yet her heart had ached sorely during those first years of wedded life. Even when all the long delays were over, and the proofs of Harcourt's death pronounced conclusive, and the inheritance his own, Roland had shrunk from returning to Morlands, and at his urgent desire they had travelled in the East, visiting scenes, to visit which had once appeared to Marion a dream of bliss. It would have been enjoyment now, the rather that change and variety were restoring her own spirits from the shock they had undergone ; but Roland's restlessness prevented her ever feeling at peace, and wherever they went, his first object was to try and discover a trace of Robert Trail. He seldom named him to his wife, but to everybody else, guide or servant, consul or acquaintance, dragoman or fellow-traveller, she found he put the same inquiries sooner or later, and the faintest indication of a clue was enough to make him alter their whole route to pursue it—always in vain. This was stopped at last by Marion's strength giving way ; and alarmed for his treasure, he yielded to her wishes to return to England. Once there, she soon won him to go to Morlands, and from that time, resolved he should remain, and if it were in human power, should be happy there. She devoted herself to please and cheer him, persuaded him to visit and invite his friends, to take up his old pursuits and sports, and, what was rather more difficult, to attend sedulously to his affairs, which the long interregnum had thrown into a little confusion. The result proved her wisdom, for occupation did more for his nerves and spirits than change of scene ; she soon found that he threw himself zealously into his work, and took a keen interest in his people ; and though the gnawing sorrow

remained, it was paramount no longer. Under Percival's influence, who, ill as he was, still persisted in his duty, many reforms were made, and many rules proposed—so many, and so stringent, that it was fortunate for all parties when the expectation of applause led to their consulting Mr. Brudenell. His gentle hints and judicious amendments saved the household more vexation than they ever knew, or were, in consequence, ever grateful for; while in all that was really practical and good, he gave valuable support. And Roland, in his passionate love for his wife, and the full occupation of his time, found solace enough to keep his mind in a tolerably healthy tone. But, as his aunt said, he had never looked like himself till the advent of his small visitant, the sound of whose voice, albeit in anything but harmonious accents, gave him such a thrill of joy as he had learned to believe impossible. His laugh, even while limited to his eyes, was his wife's best restorative; and when he was handling his baby, and looking at her for praise, as Miss Porchester said, her cup was full.

Her recovery was rapid, and as she had grown somewhat wilful, especially with her aunt, who could refuse her nothing, she obtained more liberty at an early stage thereof than Dr. Wartop would have allowed to a less petted patient. As she said herself, she gained her own way by not understanding any one else's, and as it agreed with her, nobody could find fault. It was more from prudence than from real weakness that she kept as much to her sofa as she did, and she claimed as much praise for it as Roland for his proficiency as nurse.

"I am sure she will be clever, Minnie," he observed, after a very careful examination of the infant features; "I am a great physiognomist, do you know, and I can see decided lines of intellect in the shape of her forehead."

"Can you, indeed? And yet they say she is like you, darling."

"Don't you be satirical. I am not going to have my daughter's morals corrupted by being brought up in French boarding-schools, where young women learn to

be saucy to their betters. Seriously, now, Minnie, we must have her thoroughly well taught, and she cannot begin too soon."

"She is learning as fast as she can, I am sure. I never find her backward as far as her abilities go, the little darling. My dear Roland, you need not clutch her clothes so desperately ; nurse says, no frock is ever fit to be seen after you have had her for five minutes."

"I will poison that nurse if she stands between me and my offspring. What are all these yards of stuff hung on to the poor little soul for, if not to hold by? You know a great deal about it, Mrs. Clarendon, you do, certainly. And whether you like it or not, my eldest daughter shall be a well-taught woman."

"I shall like it very much, dear, and you shall teach her yourself."

"Well, she might have a worse coach. Though I say it, none of the fellows passed better than I did, in that stiff Civil Service business ; but I know even I found it hard work, from not having had it all driven into me sooner, so I am resolved Miss Clarendon shall not have to wait till she is four-and-twenty before she understands all about the Pragmatic Sanction. Here comes Aunt Brudenell, to tell me, as usual, that I am perfectly right."

"The right man in the right place," said Mrs. Brudenell, as she entered, and having kissed her niece, seated herself with her arms and lap ready. "I'll trouble you to hand over that baby, Roland, to its lawful possessor ; there is Graves below, ready to tear his hair because he cannot catch his master, and sundry petitioners are waiting in the servants' hall. By-the-way, Cecil Percival is coming to see you, Marion, if he may. He wants to realise the pattern baby—or pretends he does—and if there is anything he wishes now, I am sure I should be the first to give it him, for he is looking very ill, notwithstanding his long rest."

"He should drink more wine ; I'll send him in a lot of port," said Roland, "only I know he will be making half the old women in the place jolly with it, instead of

himself. I wish he would marry—that is what he wants most."

"That is the best prescription you know, is it?"

"By far the best, only a great deal depends on how it is made up. Between ourselves, I am rather inclined to go and shake cousin Stella. She is breaking his heart."

"She would never marry him unless he had a handsome competence to offer her," said Mrs. Brudenell; "and even if he had, she would not like a quiet country parsonage. But shake her by all means, if you like. I have no wish to interfere in your family arrangements."

"No, on second thoughts, I shall leave that to Minnie; it will be a safe outlet for her superfluous animation, which otherwise will be let off at my expense. I suppose I must go—as men must work, and women must monopolise the baby, but it is very hard that human destinies should be so unequally divided. I will soon be back, my little angel—shut up your eyes till there is something worth looking at; Minnie, she certainly will be clever—she minds what is said to her already."

"I wish you would do the same and go," said Mrs. Brudenell, "and shut the door after you. Clever, indeed, and a child of yours! Oh, my darling," as soon as the door was safely shut, "how much we have to be thankful for in this world—and what a comfort it is to see that boy himself again!"

"You never would believe he had such deep, tender feelings," said Marion, with glistening eyes; "no one did but I, and I only learned them by degrees. He would take all the blame to himself of every difference between them, even to those two unfortunate drives. He has told me over and over again, that if he had not been provoked into going out with Stella against his will, that man would never have got into John's place, and thence to the one he had. And yet we all know it was not his fault in the least."

"We will not talk of faults, dear; we all have our share of them, and must bear with other people's. The older we grow, the more charity we need, and the more we should practise. Teach that to this darling as soon

as you please ; she may wait for the Pragmatic Sanction a little longer."

And thereupon they fell into confidential discourse touching the small, all-important personage, who had by this time subsided into slumber, and were very happy over it, but said nothing necessary for their historian to relate, and were interrupted at last by the promised visit of Percival. His first introduction was rather a failure, as the baby, being unexpectedly awakened, expressed her disgust in a manner not to be mistaken or disguised, and was carried off by the nurse, exercising her lungs in a manner more conducive to her health, than to the harmony of her home.

"It is all the fault of your cadaverous cheeks, Percival," said the Vicar's wife, when she could be heard. "They are enough to frighten an old woman of ninety, let alone an innocent babe. I am tired of all this, I can tell you, and I shall now take you in hand myself. Miss Holmby came over almost crying because you were so thin, and you would tire yourself to death, going after all the old people in Durningham who chose to send for you—and forgetting your uncle, who was very much put out."

Cecil explained, that while he was at the Rectory, he had heard a poor old woman particularly wished to see him, and by the time he had paid his visit, he was too tired to pay another. He turned hesitatingly to Marion, almost beseechingly. "It was about her I wished to speak to Mrs. Clarendon."

"To me?" repeated Marion, who was now sitting up on the sofa, to show how strong she was ; "is it a case for relief? I have done nothing yet, I am sorry to say, but Peters has a list, and she shall put her down. What is her name?"

He almost whispered it. "Trail."

Strong as Mrs. Clarendon chose to be considered, she could not control the blood that rushed to her heart at that fatal name, which no one ever mentioned if it could be avoided.

"Any relation——?" she was just able to ask.

"The only one remaining—his grandmother—old, feeble, and neglected. She helped to ruin him by her indulgence as a child, and by humouring him as a youth, and is not a model old woman by any means," he added, with a faint smile, "very dirty, and rather given to drink, as many are who have fallen in the world, and lost their self-respect with their respectability in the eyes of others. She has no claim but this—that she is his blood, and that all the world is therefore against her; the parish gives her bread, but no one gives her kindness. Her name is her curse—the very children avoid her—the kind-hearted women that sometimes do her a service, or give her a share of their meal, cannot help saying something that hurts her feelings. She had but one idol in the world, and after seeing it overthrown again and again, had just began to rejoice in its elevation, and to see others own it worthy her worship; you may imagine where her faith is now, and that it is no wonder if she be ready to curse God and die."

"Poor thing, poor thing!" said Marion, whose eyes were full of tears; "why did I not hear of this before?"

"She was not in such want at first; her grandson had given her money and presents, on which she had lived some time; but that is all gone, of course."

"What can I do for her? Do you know that there is a box full of that man's things in the house, which he had accumulated during the few months he was here. I had some difficulty in preventing Roland from having them all burnt, and I have often been afraid that he would. Ought they to be given up to this poor old woman, or have we no right to do so?"

"I cannot say; but if you wish, I will undertake the charge. Meanwhile, Mrs. Trail has earnestly begged to see Mrs. Clarendon. May I tell her she may?"

"Indeed you may do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Brudenell, who knew by her niece's flitting colour how dismayed she was by this request; "you have no business to come talking about all this just now, and if it were not

that you are young and ignorant, I should be very angry with you. A very little more, and nurse will be for putting you into the passage."

"I am young, and ignorant too," he replied, with no sign of irritability, "but I believe Mrs. Clarendon has nerve and strength to do what is right under any circumstances; I have done my duty in giving her the message--no, I have only half done it—I do implore you to see her as soon as you are equal to it, Mrs. Clarendon. You may live to be grateful to me for saying this; you may live to count her blessing a boon beyond price. Promise me you will try at least, and let me know when you can."

"I do promise," said Marion, moved by the indescribable earnestness of his pleading, "but promise in return, that she does not show herself to Roland. He cannot bear it yet, and I could not answer for what he might say or do."

"I will take care," he said, sighing, and rose to depart, followed by Mrs. Brudenell into the passage.

"I could shake you if I were not afraid of your falling to pieces," was her first observation. "Where is this poor old body to be found?"

"You will find her to-night at my lodgings. My landlady has agreed to let her have her back attic, and her husband's cart will fetch her over. She will not be there long—she is dying, and shall not die without such comfort as I can give. It is not much I have a right to offer, God forgive me."

"Well, you are a kind-hearted boy, with all your fads and fancies; and I can guess where Miss Holmby's good things will go. Only don't sit up at night, and I will come and look after your patient. It seems hard, indeed, to visit the sins of the children on the fathers, or grandmothers either, and yet we find it is so; the innocent bear the curse of the guilty."

Percival looked back nervously at the door of the room he had left. "His angels are watching there," he said; but there was a wildness in his eye, as he said it, that was not in keeping with the trustfulness of the words.

CHAPTER XVII

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

MRS. CLARENDON was sufficiently popular to make her happy recovery a matter of general satisfaction. Prosperity had not hardened her heart, or made her selfish ; but her position had compelled her to judge and act for herself much more than by nature she would have been disposed to do. Her character had thus gradually developed itself, and in more than one instance had taken people by surprise. So gentle and yielding as she seemed on some occasions, they were not prepared to find her so prompt and decided on others ; still less to see how her sunny good temper could be fired into active wrath by anything like deceit, overreaching, or oppression. Her servants learned this the first, and from the time that they *did* learn it, thought a great deal more of her than they did before ; her poor neighbours and her school children were not long in discovering it also, and though it baffled some of their calculations, it heightened their respect for her authority. She was liked by her new acquaintance in the country, and the few intimate friends whom her husband possessed, either in the neighbourhood or elsewhere, for that innate good breeding, without which kindness of heart is of little real use in the world, and which supplied, in her case, the lack of experience in society. But they found she had a will of her own, and could assert it ; and where she was convinced she was right, she would stand to her colours against anybody, or any number of bodies, with a spirit that delighted Roland.

It seemed to Marion, when she left her sick-room, and came again into the world, with renewed health and strength, rich in the blessings for which she had given thanks, as if her lot in life were blessed, not only far beyond her deserts, but beyond her powers of gratitude. In her own sphere she was paramount ; her husband was even more devoted to her than her lover had been ; she was the idol of the Vicarage—the queen of Stourbrooke,

and the envy of Durningham ; those who had been content with a curtsey, or smile of welcome, in the days when she first made their acquaintance by her aunt's side, would run out now to see her pony-carriage go by—fluttered and breathless if she only looked their way, and breathing admiration and awe behind her, as she vanished from their sight. She might teach what she pleased for Miss Poole now ; that functionary was her most ardent worshipper, gifted with unlimited belief in her wisdom and erudition. Old Mr. Holmby paid her the most chivalrous deference, and conceded point after point to give her pleasure, for which both Houses of Convocation might have argued in vain—to say nothing of Cecil Percival. With the Squire she was a special favourite, and he would often ride over to chat with her about their respective dairies, and poultry-yards, and flower-gardens ; teaching her a great deal that she was very glad to know, and thinking her all the more agreeable for being so eager to be taught. He would have been kind and attentive to her, as Mrs. Brudenell's intelligent, retiring niece ; but as Mrs. Clarendon of Morlands, she was a sister potentate, and he pronounced her the most charming little woman he had ever met. And all this popularity being added to wealth and influence, it is not to be wondered at that she was an object of envy to Stella, whom she now so completely overshadowed. Stella's feelings towards her, in fact, were beyond her own power to analyse. At times, she felt a strong yearning to win her affections and bestow hers in return, for there was that in Marion's nature which peculiarly attracted her own ; at others, she could not keep down the jealous resentment that swelled her heart, as she thought of all her past visions, fulfilled in the person of a rival. At such moments, she could speak bitterly, she could frame cruel wishes, she could long to be doing something, equally bitter, equally cruel, that should bring Marion Clarendon down from her height, and reduce her to her proper level. Marion would find her, accordingly, sarcastic, indifferent, repelling ; and would go away, slightly ruffled, saying to herself, that now she was quite determined, and nothing should induce her

again to attempt a friendship with her husband's cousin. But the next time they met, Stella would have recovered her temper, and Mrs. Clarendon have forgotten her provocation.

On the whole, therefore, the intercourse between them had been of a sufficiently friendly character to pass for intimacy ; and no attentions had ever been lacking on Roland's part to his aunt and cousin. Hardly a week passed without some good thing or other, from dairy or hothouse, kitchen-garden, or poultry-yard, finding its way into the White House ; not to mention game throughout the season, the loan of a horse for Stella, and the constant use of the carriage by Mrs. Porchester. The latter, indeed, owned in confidence, that she could not have been better cared for if Stella had filled Marion's place ; perhaps not so well, for Stella hated the trouble of paying attentions, and would have been sure to want the carriage perpetually herself. If only the dear girl would marry, and settle comfortably, not far off, and if their income were only just double what it was, and everybody paid, she really did think she could pass the rest of her days at the White House, close to dear Marion and the baby, without a murmur.

Everybody paid—that was a serious clause, and growing so much more serious as days went by, that it brought Stella near the extremity she had long dreaded, almost with desperation. Gervase Wray was still kept uncertain of his fate, and knowing with whom he had to deal, waited patiently. Mrs. Porchester's heart failed her every time she had been sent to talk to her nephew on money matters ; and Stella found it would be easier to speak to his wife first, than to face her afterwards.

They were sitting together in Marion's morning-room, the sweet scent of haymaking coming in at the open window, Nelson lying at Marion's feet, who, with a small note-book on her knee, was putting down names as they occurred to herself or her companion. The baby had, of course, been christened as soon as she could take it to church ; but the proposed *fête* in its honour had been deferred till her complete recovery. It was now a decided

point that it was to be given as soon as the hay was saved, and Stella, as possessing the experience in which Mrs. Clarendon was deficient, was her prime counsellor in her difficulties. All was amicably settled at last—the arrangements for croquet, the band of music, the collation, and the dancing; and the list of guests only waited for Roland's sanction and additions. It was to be partly a juvenile *fête*, as appropriate to the occasion, and Mr. Brudenell's friends, the Grahams, were to sleep at the Vicarage the night before, that the three little girls might share the unwonted treat. General Alexander and Mrs. Lyndsay, with other guests from a distance, would be accommodated at Morlands, and Marion suggested inviting Mr. Wray.

"Gervase Wray?" said Stella, quickly; "then I shall stay at home."

"My dear Stella, I beg your pardon; I only named him because I thought it would be just what you would wish."

"I wish sometimes that I had never seen his face; at others, I am tempted to see too much of it. Ah, Marion, you are a happy woman!"

"So I am—much happier than I deserve, or than I once thought I ever could be. I should be happier still if I could help to make you so. What is it?"

And she pushed her memoranda away, and looked earnestly at her visitor. Stella had learned the language of that look: she knew what it was saying now. "Tell me the truth, and only the truth, for I am sure to find it out if you don't." More than once had she drawn back from an intended evasion, sooner than meet it—more than once, having met, she had yielded to the spell of sincerity, and opened her soul without reserve. That spell wrought on her now.

"It is just this," she said, "that my mother and I have so much exceeded our income, that we must do something to retrieve our affairs, and Gervase Wray will accommodate my mother, if I will consent to marry him. Just like him, is it not? You know he has realised one of his numerous 'Great Expectations,' and has more money to

spend than he ever had before ; so the first thing he does in the way of investment is to offer to buy *me*."

" You do not love him ? "

" Love him ? No—his bargain would be a good one, if he could have love for his money. But I am tempted to close it, notwithstanding."

" You would be miserable, Stella."

" Not more so than others—not more so than I often am now. You would be afraid of me if you knew half the wicked things of which I feel capable sometimes."

" I dare say I should ; but you will never do them. Stella, I wish I knew the real state of your heart. I have thought more than once that I understood you, but I am uncertain still. If I knew the truth, I should see my way clearer towards helping you."

" Tell me what you conjecture, and I promise to answer truly—and, moreover, not to be affronted, which I see you expect will be the result."

" On that promise, then, I will rely. I have thought, often thought, that the man you really love—have loved all along—is Mr. Percival."

There was a short silence before Stella replied, " I have often thought so too."

" I am sure of it—and he is so good, and looks so unhappy, and I do believe it is all your fault."

" His goodness, or his unhappiness ? Depend upon it, my dear, the one is the cause of the other, and not any cruelty of mine. He has dreams of impossible perfection, that must be attained by making yourself perfectly miserable and odious, and it is killing him, as everybody may see—but it is not my doing. He could stay away the whole winter, and come back cool and indifferent; and if that be love, I would rather have nothing to say to it."

" But if his apparent indifference only means that he does not think you care for him, or that he has not a fortune to offer you—would it not add to your happiness if these hindrances were taken out of his way ?"

" I do not know—it might. I have had my dreams too ; but I am afraid he would expect too much from me. I am not good enough for him, and if he does not think

so now, he would then. Marion, do you remember that day I was your nurse—the day after your accident?"

"I am rather confused about those days, but I do remember your sitting with me, and bringing me a rose from Roland."

"Did you overhear anything that was said that day by the maids in the next room?"

"I did, but I was never sure that I had heard rightly, and it confused my head all night. I had a vague, wretched feeling that I had done something to injure you, and that you were hating me for it; and it haunted me (I do not mind owning it now) till I had seen you again, and found you as kind as ever."

"If I was kind, it was because I was too proud to be otherwise; but, Marion, many a time during that period I could have rushed into your room, and told you I hated you. It rankled in my temper till it became unbearable, and I revenged myself on Harcourt by encouraging Mr. Percival. I know it was very wrong, for my motives were as low as they could be, and I am punished for all now. A few years more, and I shall be out of fashion, and pushed aside by my juniors, and have nothing to look forward to but green tea and gossip, if I can afford to buy the one, or find any one to indulge me in the other."

She had risen, and walked to the window in suppressed excitement.

"I trifled with two such hearts as I shall never meet with again. Harcourt loved me then, better than you; those women were only repeating the idle slanders of the servants' hall: he did love me, I know, and thought none my equal—but I vexed and thwarted and irritated him, and let him think I preferred another. And that other loved me too, and believed he was winning me, when I was using his regard as the tool of my jealousy and pride. Now it is his turn, and I must bear what I deserve—and I suppose it will end in my marrying Gervase Wray."

"That it shall not," said Marion, "if I can prevent it. You shall not throw your happiness away for want of a

little help." And she followed Stella to the window, and passed her arm round her waist. "Look upon us as your brother and sister, and let us act for you. I am to see Mr. Percival presently, as I promised to call on that poor old woman to whom he is so kind. When I went before, she was asleep, and I would not have her disturbed. And for the rest, Stella, I must talk to Roland, and see what he says. I am quite sure he would do anything he could, and so would I."

These were simple words, but of their sincerity there could be no question, and Miss Porchester's heart felt relieved of half its burden. Her own unwonted humility gave her a sense of peace and rest that were strangely refreshing; and jealousy and envy were laid to sleep. If indeed Cecil loved her still, and she could begin a new unembarrassed life under his guidance, the gnawing vacuity would be filled up, and the disappointing past remembered only as a dream. And during the rest of the day she was weaving plans of rapid clerical advancement, by which he would be able both to distinguish himself, and to place her in the position in which she felt she should do him most credit. He was a bishop, at least, before she fell asleep that night, and the newspapers were full of reports of the last great speech by which he had electrified the House of Lords.

Marion, meanwhile, had paid her promised visit, which, the longer it was delayed, only made her the more anxious to get it over. She meant it to be her first and last; shrinking, as every one did, from the very name the old woman bore, and having done what was required, to make Percival her almoner afterwards. The room was clean and tidy—Cecil's landlady took care of that, and her daughter attended to the poor creature's little wants. She had taken to her bed as soon as she arrived, and there seemed little probability of her leaving it. Unattractive, common-place she was in every respect, but her heart was breaking, and her only comfort was in the presence of Mr. Percival. He had surrounded her with remembrances of her grandson. His paintings, rescued secretly from destruction at Morlands, hung on the hall; his box of

clothes was in a corner—an old book of plays he had pawned at Durningham was on the table near the bed, by a Bible and Prayer-book. Not that she read either, for except when Cecil was by her side, her intellect seemed to be in a half torpid state. She would lie and mutter to herself, Mrs. Andrews told Marion, for an hour together, and sometimes cry about her poor boy; but she never talked to any one but Mr. Percival, or seemed to care about anything that any one else said to her. She hardly noticed Mrs. Clarendon, until the curate came in, and bending down to her ear, repeated the name distinctly. Then her glassy eyes lighted up for a moment, and she half whispered, with eager exultation, "They telled me he saved her life—she'd ha' been smashed to bits if he hadn't laid hold on them beasts, like a brave lad as he allus was. He promised me a new red cloak come Christmas, but he went away without giving it, and I shan't have it now. He'll not come back no more, no more—he allus said he should do better in another country, and I'll be bound he has. Got a home of his own, and forgets his granny altogether."

And she whimpered a little, and went on muttering.

"Her mind is going," said Marion, in a low voice to Percival, whose look of intense anguish she could not understand. Her own feeling was that of pity, so mixed with horror and aversion, that she would gladly have put her purse on the table, and escaped from the house; but his quiet, authoritative sign, as he took a small book from his pocket, compelled her to remain.

"I am going to pray with you, Mrs. Trail," he said, very gently.

"Ay?" was her only answer.

"I am going to ask God to have mercy on a poor wanderer, heavy-laden with guilt, and needing the prayers of his brethren, especially those he has wronged. Will you join with me?"

She was evidently accustomed to such an appeal.

"Ay, God bless him, wherever he is!"

"Amen!"

So fervently and solemnly was this uttered, that Ma-

rion looked at him in astonishment ; and saw that he was watching her with eyes full of tears. He knelt down immediately, and she could do no less ; and before the short prayer was ended, she was almost weeping too. Whether the old woman followed his words, they could not tell ; but when they had risen from their knees, she looked round almost cheerfully.

“ He’ll sleep the better for that, and so shall I. Good-bye, my dear—God bless you.”

“ Shake hands with her,” said Percival, and Marion felt compelled to obey. He went with her to the door, and gave her his arm down stairs. “ Thank you,” he said at parting ; “ you have set us all a good example ; you have obeyed in simple faith, not asking a reason. And though you do not know it, you have your reward.”

She had another reward, for which she was not quite prepared. Roland was at home when she returned, and asked where she had been. She explained, as tenderly as she could ; but for the first time in his life, he was angry with her. He wondered she could have done such a thing—have offered him such an affront :—Percival ought to be ashamed of himself for asking it—it must not happen again. The workhouse was the place for the woman, instead of sentimental coddling under their very eyes, at the gates of their very house. “ How could you do it, Marion ?” was his last reproach, as he strode away to his dressing-room, and locked himself in. It was a terrible discovery to her that she could so grievously offend him, and the moment he appeared again she was ready with a petition for forgiveness. She would not shield herself by laying the blame on Percival, neither could she say she thought she had done wrong ; but that Roland was displeased was misery enough, and she was more anxious for pardon than for acquittal. Happily for both, his anger was never long-lived, and the moment he saw her distressed, he pronounced himself a brute, undeserving of such an angel ; but angel as she was, she must discriminate in her visits ; and if she did not wish to give him pain, must leave Percival’s *protégée* alone. She acquiesced with perfect submission, and, with wifely tact,

decided on not bringing forward Stella's case till the next day.

The next day brought its own cares ; urgent letters from London demanded Roland's presence on matters of business, likely to detain him till the arrival of his guests, unless he started immediately ; and start he did, promising to despatch matters as quickly as he could, and giving her carte-blanche, meanwhile, in all arrangements —as, indeed, she generally had. The subject of Widow Trail was not revived, but Marion put money into the hands of her uncle, and felt her conscience clear towards all parties. She could not even wish to see again a person who had brought upon her the only unloving look she had ever met from her husband's eyes—a look that would return, long after Roland had forgotten it.

If tender letters could have made her forget it, too, she received her share ; but his business was not so readily despatched as he expected, and day after day slipped by without bringing him back. He faithfully promised to be home in time for General Alexander, who was to arrive the day before the *fête*; but that very morning came a few scrawled, blotted lines, as if written in violent haste, telling her news had come to the police from Germany, which made it necessary for him to start by the night mail ; she must make his excuses—his friends would feel for him—he would write when he could. And Mrs. Brudenell, coming over to see what help she could give, found the lady of Morlands very much disposed to cry over this disappointment.

"Dear child," she said, briskly, "may you never have a heavier care ! The poor boy was right to go, if anything has really come to light, and if he had been prevented, would have made himself ill, as you know. It is hard upon you, but you must show you are equal to an emergency, and don't give goodnatured people anything to talk about."

Marion admitted this was good advice, but her heart being full, she confided the fact which oppressed her, of having made him angry the day before he left.

"Is that all you are fretting your little heart about ?

When you have done it a dozen times, you will think nothing of it. I tell you what, my darling, it is not pleasant to see a man cross, but then you can have the consolation of thinking how much better you are than he is ; it is living with a husband like your uncle that is the real trial—a man who is always right ; and to whom you are obliged, sooner or later, to own that you are wrong. So make yourself easy with this reflection, that bad as your case may be, it will never be so bad as mine.”

“ A person wishes to speak to you, ma’am.”

The words were dropped in Marion’s ear as the butler took her coffee-cup that evening. She had followed her aunt’s advice, and exerted herself diligently for the entertainment of her guests, and, supported by Stella, and encouraged by Mrs. Lyndsay, had gone through her part with considerable success. Courteous allowance was made for Roland’s absence, and due sympathy expressed for the cause ; and the General took the bottom of the table, and was now keeping Mr. Percival of Durningham well amused by political anecdotes, over their wine. Cecil had been invited, but declined on the plea of business ; and the first idea that crossed Mrs. Clarendon’s mind, on hearing that she was wanted, was that it was some message about old Mrs. Trail.

“ What person is it, Richards, do you know ?”

“ No one belonging to this place, ma’am, I think. He speaks like a foreigner, and I should say, he was just off a journey.”

“ Go and ask his name, and what he has come about, as I am engaged to-night. If it is only to ask for money, let him call in the morning.”

“ Yes, ma’am.” Richards collected the cups, and withdrew ; but presently returned, with a slip of folded paper on his salver. “ If you please, ma’am, he gave me this to deliver to you.”

The other ladies looked on curiously, as Marion opened the paper. It only contained these words, in a scarcely legible hand. “ My business, Madame, is secret, urgent, most important. Deign to accord a few minutes to an old friend of the late Mr. Saville.”

"Where is the person, Richards?" she asked, as she twisted up the note in her trembling fingers.

"He is in the hall, ma'am."

"Put lights in the library, and show him in there. Stella," as her cousin came up with an inquiring glance, "will you show Mrs. Lyndsay the cameos we were talking of at dinner? They are in that cabinet; I am wanted by somebody. I shall be back in a minute."

She hurried to the library; the name of her step-father being quite enough to fill her with a nervous dread of any one but herself hearing what there was to be told.

"Wait in the hall, Richards," she said to her stately retainer, as he opened the library door to let her pass; and the next moment she was alone, with a tall, foreign-looking personage, in green spectacles, who bowed as she entered, with an apology, in tolerable English, for his unseasonable intrusion. He feared he had not the honour of being remembered by Madame; it was long since they had met, but he believed she would know the name of Achille Lepelletier. That name was indeed sufficient, and when he removed his spectacles, she remembered him only too well.

"I am at a loss to imagine, sir, what you can have to say to me," she began, with some hauteur, "or why you have described yourself to me as Mr. Saville's friend."

"Pardon me, Madame, that last presumption; it was my knowledge of your tenderness towards that deceased gentleman that made me foresee you would not resist an appeal to his memory. I have not deceived you, Madame," seeing her about to move to the door, "my business is all I have described to you—and more. I will not detain you long—permit me first to offer my humble and respectful congratulations on your brilliant lot. Our deceased friend would indeed rejoice in his tomb if he saw what I see to-night."

She knew what was in his mind; she knew how differently she was dressed now from the time when she had first seen him, in her mother's presence, on one of those occasions, never to be obliterated from her memory, when Mr. Saville, pushed to extremity, had

called on his wife for aid, and, by solemn vows of amendment, wrung from her almost the last remnant of her husband's wealth. The whole scene passed before her, and she could with difficulty retain composure enough to request he would state his errand as briefly as possible, as she was particularly engaged.

"I will be brief, Madame, if you will be patient. Are you aware that the evening of Mr. Saville's lamented decease he borrowed of me a sum of money, which was not repaid?"

"No, sir; I have heard nothing about it; and I do not see that it concerns me in the least."

"Consider, Madame, consider. You were as his daughter—you revere his memory—you would not wish a stain to rest on his honour—and why was this money borrowed? It was to play—to play at the tables; and with that money of mine he did play and he did win hundreds, and it killed him, and I was too tender-hearted, too sorry for you, *pauvre demoiselle*, left so suddenly, to press my claim: *mais enfin!* I am poor, I want money, I come to see if you are generous, and will pay me back what is my due."

"I can undertake nothing of the kind without Mr. Clarendon's sanction, and he is not at home. If you choose to state your claim in writing, and send it to me, I will show it to him on his return. And now I shall wish you good evening."

"Stay, Madame; you have not heard all yet—this was only a little beginning—I have more to say. Listen, Madame, for what I tell you concerns you, your husband, your young child—all your house. It concerns not me, but as business—to you it is life and death. You listen?"

She bowed coldly, for she was as yet incredulous.

"Ah! you do not believe—wait! I have a family secret in my power—a terrible secret—and no one knows it but me, and I am come to sell it to you. Your husband is away—I know it: I know more—he is out of England. I cannot wait till his return. I come to you, his wife: you hold his purse—you can buy. One hun-

dred pounds for my secret, and it is yours, and if you like to tell it, that regards *you*—if you would bind me to tell no one else, one hundred pounds more, and I am silent for ever. Fifty pounds I lent Mr. Saville—two hundred and fifty in all. You will buy?”

“Certainly not: I can have nothing to say to such a proposal without knowing more.”

“Ah, but you cannot know till you buy, and when you buy, then you open your purse, and fold your hands to make me silent. You do not know—you are a child, playing at the foot of Vésuve, and the liquid fire will pour over you while the toys are in your hands. I offer you escape, and you hesitate. Why should I come here to-night, if I had nothing to sell? In England no man gives anything—all is bought and sold, even your national honour—bah! I offer you to-night—to-morrow, if I do not sell to you, I offer to others—they will not pay me to be silent, but to speak—that suit you not so well. You love your husband, your child; you can save them—will you buy?”

Marion put her hand to her forehead; his earnestness impressed her, in spite of her contempt. Was it possible that he was speaking the truth—that he could have anything to reveal that could affect Roland, or her little one? It seemed too monstrous to believe, and yet a sickening fear of she knew not what seemed creeping through every vein. He saw his advantage, and pursued it.

“Remember this, Madame, I warn you against asking advice. To me it matters not, but to you it matters greatly. You will wish you had paid double, before you let any one know what I have told you. I swear I am speaking the truth—and I know you are beginning to believe me.”

“I do believe you are in earnest, sir; though it seems impossible that you should not be mistaken. But you must be aware I do not keep such sums of money in the house—I must have time to think it over, and if I decide on giving what you ask, you shall have it as soon as it can be procured. I say this without making any promise;

and now I must beg of you to leave me. What is your address?"

"Madame, I will call again to-morrow at noon, to learn your pleasure. I am quite safe in your house—you are a lady, and honourable, and would take no mean advantage of my confidence. You will allow me a crust of bread before I go: I have travelled far, and am hungry."

She opened the door, and called Richards.

"Bring a glass of sherry and some biscuits."

The butler hastened to obey, and Lepelletier, with a low bow, drank the wine, pocketed the biscuits, and turned to depart. "To-morrow, at noon, I shall do myself the honour. Adieu, Madame, adieu!"

He was gone, and Marion went back to her friends, turned off their inquiries as lightly as she could, conversed, played and sang, and did her duty, with throbbing pulse and burning cheeks, that impressed Mrs. Porchester with the dismal conviction that she would be ill the next day, and the party put off. "The first real party she has ever given here, it would be so extremely unlucky for her to be ill," she repeated so often, that Mrs. Lyndsay replied at last, she thought it might be equally unlucky if it were the twentieth. And Marion, overhearing them, laughed, as at some excellent joke, denied that she was ill, and went across the room to be talked to by old Mr. Percival, about the comparative size of the timber of Durningham and Morlands.

"I ask no impertinent questions, Marion," were Stella's parting words, "but if there is anything we ought to know, let us know it soon. When will Roland come back?"

"I shall have a letter some time to-morrow. Don't talk of it—I can hardly bear it as it is," said Marion, with a sob, as she turned hastily away to help Mrs. Porchester with her cloak.

The house had been still an hour, and yet she had not undressed. Her maid had taken the flowers from her hair, and had then been dismissed to bed. She wanted

to be alone, to think quietly over the strange interview of the evening, and decide what she ought to do. As she sat musing, and weighing probabilities, she suddenly recollect ed the packet of money delivered to her by Harcourt, and which, at her request, he locked up again in his desk. She remembered his telling her there was a memorandum of the amount, and of a debt to Lepellitier —she thought he said it had been paid. The desk was still where he left it, in his private room, where no one ever went but herself and Peters, to see that all was kept in order. The keys were in her possession; Peters was gone to bed by this time, but there was no reason why she should not go into them alone. She took a candle, and having ascertained that there was no chance of being seen, unlocked the door of the private staircase by which she had been brought by Peters the first time she visited those deserted apartments.

She had not quite realised how lonely they would look at that hour, by that feeble light—nor the force with which the memories of that first visit would rush upon her mind. As she stood in the little workshop, with Harcourt's carving on the walls, his tools, his lathe, his pile of wood in the corner where he left it,—and put into the lock of the desk the little Bramah key she remembered so well, it seemed as if it were only yesterday that she had come in there as his guest, and had seen him open that outer door—never opened since he went away. And she thought how tenderly and kindly he had spoken —how considerate he had been of her feelings—how generous in all his dealings with her and hers—and heavily did it strike on her heart, that it was she who had been the innocent cause of his estrangement, exile, and death. It had often done so before, but the pang of this moment was as acute as if freshly given. She could hear the soft tone of his voice, as he said to her that day, “Can you trust me?” and she knew she *had* trusted him, had so relied on his generous nature, that she had felt sanguine of winning him home—of compelling him to give her a brother's love in return for that, which if not all he sought to win, would have been

faithful, and pure, and true. And all had ended in this—that he slept unavenged in his far-off grave, and that she could do nothing to atone for the sorrow she had caused, but honour and mourn for his memory.

Was it the force of that memory, acting on her senses—or did she really hear a sound as if a key were once more turning in that lock? For a moment she was afraid her nerve was giving way, and that she had conjured up a vision out of her excited fancy; the next, she was recoiling in mortal fear, for the door was unlocked, and slowly, stealthily opening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GERVASE WRAY IS FAR FROM SATISFIED.

“IF you please, sir,” said Nancy, tapping at her master’s door, “it is a note from Morlands, and to wait for an answer, please, sir.”

Ungrammatical might be the information, but that was allowed to pass. The fact of a note from Morlands arriving before Mr. Brudenell was dressed, was important enough in itself, and full of alarming suggestions. The Vicar opened his door, and received it with a shaking hand. The last two years had aged him considerably, and his strength and nerve were by no means what they had been. He was a minute or two finding his glasses, and even then had a little difficulty in reading the note. Marion generally wrote a clear, bold hand, like her father; but this specimen looked very much as if it had been written in the dark, all the words jumbled up together. However, he deciphered it at last.

“As soon as you possibly can, dearest uncle, pray come to me. I want your advice on a matter of great importance, and every hour is of consequence. Tell no one but dear aunt. Come at once if you can.

“Your own M. C.”

He read this three times over, and then called in his wife. "Read that, Maria."

She was quicker about it than he was, and looked at him in consternation. "What can be the matter? If any one was ill, she would have sent for me. What shall you do, Julian?"

"Send back the messenger, in the first place. Give me a pencil." He wrote on a slip of paper, "All shall be as you wish, my dear." And Mrs. Brudenell, whose toilet was by this time complete, went down herself to deliver it to the boy, with a cheerful word on the fineness of the morning. Neither he nor Nancy could have suspected any anxiety from her tone or manner. She lingered a few minutes, to make sure he was gone, then wrote a line to Cecil Percival, asking him to take the service that morning, despatched Nancy to his lodgings, and ordered a cup of coffee to be brought up for the Vicar without delay. It was only just put on the table when he came down.

"I have sent to Cecil, my dear, and as soon as you have swallowed this, you may go. Julian," almost in a whisper, "have you the remotest idea what she can want you for?"

"I can only conjecture that she may have had some painful news—perhaps about poor Saville. An application for money, perhaps—there is no knowing—and her husband being away, she sends for me. You will go with our friends to church as usual. If I want you, I will send a note. Be careful—the dear child evidently wishes not to excite curiosity."

"She has taken a queer way of carrying out her wishes. I declare, if it were any one but Marion, I should be very cross; but that child has sense, and it is that which alarms me."

It was rather difficult for Mrs. Brudenell to greet her guests, the Grahams, as they came down, one after another, and to behave herself as if nothing were on her mind but hospitable cares; but by hurrying them off to the early service, she escaped dangerous questions for the time. They supposed the Vicar to have gone on before, and when they found he was not in the church, could

make no inquiries till afterwards. As they were returning, they saw him coming along the road. His tall form had begun to bend now, his hair was much whiter than it had been, and his walk was slow ; but he was still the idol of the three Miss Grahams, who rushed to meet and escort him home.

“ Why were you not at church, sir ? Where have you been ? You said you were going with us, and we should walk with you,” were the clamorous greetings, to which he gently replied with a smile, that he could not be in two places at once, and that, like their papa, he was liable to be sent for at any moment.

“ Were you sent for this morning ? Was it for somebody who was very sick, and very poor, and very miserable indeed ? ” asked the youngest, shaking her head at each epithet.

“ Yes, dear ; and so I hope you will excuse me not keeping my appointment, and we will go in to breakfast.”

The breakfast was a merry meal, and the little Grahams thought nothing had ever tasted so good ; they were allowed to prattle to their hearts’ content, and their parents listened smilingly, and thought how much good it must do their kind old friends to hear them. And when they could be heard themselves, they had questions to ask, and a great deal to say, about Morlands, and the Clarendons, and poor Harcourt’s fate—topics on which people never grew tired of dilating—but which, just then, the Vicar would gladly have avoided. He had only given himself time to make a very slight repast, before he looked at his watch.

“ I beg your pardon, Mrs. Graham, but I must ask you to excuse me. I have promised to pay another early visit this morning, and I see it is high time I set out. I shall not be detained long.”

There was a general lament and remonstrance, but Mrs. Brudenell said nothing. She went on dispensing tea, and helping her guests to eggs, and ham, and hot rolls, and marmalade, with cheerful assiduity, until he was leaving the room ; when she put down her teapot, and

hastened after him. A few words—there was not time for more—passed between them ; and then she came back to her place.

" I am afraid you do a little too much altogether," said Mrs. Graham, looking at her affectionately ; " you are rather pale. Do not trouble yourself about us any more, but sit down, and have your own breakfast. Little people, if any one says another word before Mrs. Brudenell has had her cup of tea, I shall be really ashamed of you."

" No, no, let them chatter," said the hostess ; " bless their hearts, they cannot be children all their lives—let them be happy while they may. Trouble comes soon enough, and heavy enough—sometimes where it is least looked for—but mercy comes with it, God be thanked, for all !"

Her voice suddenly failed ; she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and hurried into the next room, where they heard her sobbing passionately.

The father and mother looked at each other, and at their astonished little ones ; and whispered pitying words, of that sorrow which they believed their presence had revived in the childless mother's heart ; and when Mrs. Brudenell came back, with red eyes, and an apology for being so foolish, she was received more lovingly than ever, without even the inquisitive youngest asking why she had cried.

Meanwhile, the Vicar had taken his way to the King's Arms, the Commercial Inn of Stourbrooke—a place of some pretensions in the old coaching days, having a good name for ale and cheese. It stood very much on its respectability now, and the landlord was an ally of Mr. Brudenell's ; and as the Vicar consulted his interest as far as possible, on all the festive occasions in which he took part, the host was always careful that nothing should be done contrary to Mr. Brudenell's wishes and opinion. With Mr. Percival, when he first came, he had a serious quarrel ; but as his girls became the curate's ardent disciples, a truce was patched up by their intervention, and whenever they met now, it was on terms of the most guarded civility.

The sight of the Vicar walking into the bar at that early hour surprised all who were there, and Mrs. Lloyd, the landlady, hurried out of her private parlour to make her curtsey, and ask if she could be of service. Mr. Brudenell explained he had come on a little matter of business with one of her guests—a French gentleman, M. Lepelletier.

“Gentleman, sir, do you call him?” quoth Mrs. Lloyd; “just like your kindness to everybody to give him such a name. He is here, sir—oh yes, he is here, and the sooner he goes the better I shall be pleased, for between ourselves, Mr. Brudenell,” in a more cautious tone, “he gives me the impression of being one of the swell mob, and that’s the truth. No gentleman would consort with such as he, *I know.*”

The Vicar shook his head, but would not argue the point. “We will call him so till we find him behave otherwise, Mrs. Lloyd. Can I see him in a private room?”

“Certainly, Mr. Brudenell, sir, if you please. Will you send up your name?”

“No; merely that a gentleman wishes to see M. Lepelletier on business.”

There was some delay before any notice was taken of this; and it transpired afterwards, that before trusting himself to the interview, M. Lepelletier took a private inspection of his visitor through the keyhole. That any danger could be hidden under that stooping form and those white locks, even his suspicious conscience could not anticipate, and he ventured at last to appear. Mr. Brudenell’s first care was to ascertain that there were no listeners; he then went direct to the matter in hand.

“You called, sir, last evening, on Mrs. Clarendon of Morlands. It is from her that I am come to wait upon you. She has commissioned me to act for her, in the absence of Mr. Clarendon, so as to save you the trouble of calling again.”

“She does me honour, M. le Curé.”

“To tell you the truth, sir, I think she does you more honour than you are quite entitled to. I hesitate not to

say, that you were not justified in applying to her personally at all."

"M. le Curé, permit me to differ from you. I have known Madame a long time; I know her past family troubles; I know a great deal—and I offer to Madame to buy my silence. If she will not, I have but to carry my goods to another market, you see."

"You spoke of a secret last night."

"I did, sir; a terrible secret. Will she buy it?"

"You named the terms. How are we to rely on your keeping your part of the contract?"

"My word of honour, sir, should be sufficient; or any oath you please."

"I shall profane no oaths by administering them to such as you, to whom honour is an empty name. Here is the money you asked for—money, won by George Saville, whom you tempted again and again to his ruin, and in winning which, he met the angel of God, telling him *that night his soul should be required of him*. His step-daughter has evidence that he repaid you, as you yourself well know; but she concedes that point, and sends you the full amount of your demand, on these conditions—that you breathe not a word to living being of what you know, and that you leave this place immediately."

He spread the bank-notes on the table; the Frenchman's eyes danced with greedy rapture.

"Ah, M. le Curé! you bring me new life. I will go this hour. And you would not hear my secret, though you pay for it?"

"No, sir; I wish to hear nothing. Do you accept the conditions?"

"Without reserve. You think me without honour; I will prove you are wrong. I swear to be silent—silent as the dead. Ah, M. le Curé! you believe everything; you believe the dead can rise and walk—yes? Then we are brothers in faith, for so do I. I take this money, and I kiss the fair hands of Madame. She has acted as a wise woman should, and she shall not repent. Ah! if George had but lived to see her now, in so fine a house, so rich, so well dressed! It was a pity to die so soon, and lose it all!"

"Oblige me, sir, by saying no more, but put up your money and make your arrangements to set off immediately. You have obtained your object, and your spoil. Take the advice of an old man, whom you may never see again, and lead a better life while you have time. It is not yet too late; you have been spared, when the man you tempted was cut off. That very money is a witness and a warning: let the evil it has done end here, and God forgive you what you have done yourself."

"Now do, Mr. Brudenell, sir," said Mrs. Lloyd, way-laying him as he passed out, "do have just a thimbleful of sherry before you walk home—you are looking so poorly this morning!"

"Not any, thank you. Your guest is going to leave you directly, Mrs. Lloyd. I shall be much obliged if you will let one of your lads follow him to the station, and bring me word when he has seen him off."

"It shall be done, sir; and a good riddance, say I, of all such rubbish as that. There is his bell ringing, to be sure, like the first lord in the land. Betsey!—24's bell! —If he asks for his bill, I am making it out this minute."

But 24 seemed in no hurry for his bill; his first care was to order a sumptuous breakfast, with hot meat, and the best wine in the cellar; and as this repast took some time in preparing, and was leisurely consumed, it was not till the middle of the day that he started for the station, in the fly belonging to the King's Arms—one of the stable-boys, by Mrs. Lloyd's orders, being mounted on the box.

The up-train was behind time, as usual, and while Lepelletier was sauntering along the platform, a down-train arrived, whence alighted two persons to whom his face was familiar. They stared at each other when they recognised him; and presently, Auguste stood before him, touching his hat, and requesting he would be good enough to step this way, where he would find his master.

"Ah, *mon cher M. Wray*, is it you? What happiness I bless my good star that has detained me for this meeting."

" You have been doing business here?" asked Wray, significantly.

" A little—a very little. I have had the honour of calling on Madame Clarendon, and she has behaved quite like a lady. I have known her so long, I had no fear. Yes, yes, our little business is over."

" What business could you have with Mrs. Clarendon, I should like to know?"

" You would like—ah, yes!—but I am a man of honour—I never reveal a lady's secrets. She knows Achille Lepelletier, and that his heart is one stainless diamond. She appealed to it in the right way," slapping his pocket, "and it did not fail to respond. But *chut!*—not a word—this is all in confidence; and yonder comes my *convoy*. I wish you good morning."

Gervase Wray looked after him for a moment; then beckoned to his valet, to whom he gave some whispered instructions, seconded by a bank note; and when the up-train started it carried both Frenchmen with it to London. Wray watched them off, and stood so deep in thought as almost to have forgotten his own wants, till a porter, touching his hat, asked if he wanted a fly to Morlands, as there was one waiting from the King's Arms.

" To Morlands? Yes,—I do. Stay—drive me first to the White House;" and to the White House he was driven, musing the while on what he had just heard. What could Marion Clarendon have to conceal, that she should give money to that man? Some ugly business or other connected with George Saville, perhaps, which she was hushing up, lest it should come to the ears of her husband; nothing more likely. She was no friend of his, he was quite aware; and if this were true, she might have cause to regret it. He might find occasion to show her that it was worth her while to secure his good will; and he was deep in conjectures and probabilities, when he reached his destination.

Mrs. Porchester met him at the door.

" So glad you are come—I didn't breathe a syllable to Stella; it will be quite a surprise. I have been looking out for you the last hour, afraid to go up and dress for the

déjeûner at Morlands, for fear you should come while I was up-stairs. Such a pity Roland could not come back in time; but your being here will be everything to me and Stella too."

"I wish I could believe that," said Gervase Wray. He had not time for more, as Stella came in at the moment, elegantly dressed for the festival, but wearing no festal aspect. She started at the sight of her visitor, and gave a sharp glance at her mother, which decided that good lady that it was high time she got ready too.

"I did not expect you to-day, Mr. Wray," said Stella, as soon as they were alone.

"I could not stay away any longer," was his reply, in a tone of some humility; "I have had long patience, but it fails me at times, and then I can hardly bear the suspense."

"I thought I had ended your suspense," said she, coldly.

"It never can end while I have a hope left—and I must hope till you are married."

"I shall never marry. If you have only come to vex and torment me, I shall go up-stairs again, and send an excuse to Morlands. If you are in the humour to be pleasant and agreeable, you can follow me there with mamma. I promised Marion I would be early, to help her receive her guests."

"You are very intimate with Mrs. Clarendon, I suppose?"

"We meet often; I was there yesterday."

"Were you? Did she strike you as having anything on her mind, to cause her anxiety?"

"Only her husband's absence about that horrible affair—yes, by the way, I thought she did look a little worried by somebody who came on business in the evening, and insisted on her going to speak to him."

"Just so," said Gervase Wray, with a slight smile.

"What makes you ask? Do you know of anything?"

"No; I have my own opinion, that is all. Poor thing! The mischief some people do is not over when they are in their graves, and I should never be surprised to find her

in some vexatious predicament, from her connexion with George Saville."

"You think this person had something to do with him?"

"I am nearly sure of it. I have just seen the man, and know who he is, and what he is—certainly, no one with whom she could have anything to do on her own account."

"It was very close of her to keep it from me," observed Stella.

"I think it was; you had a right to her confidence, as you put so much in her judgment, and act so entirely by her advice."

"Who told you that?"

"You tell it me yourself, by your coldness to me. I know she is not my advocate, and I need one sorely. Stella, dearest Stella, let me plead for myself." And as she did not forbid him in words, he seized his opportunity, and pleaded, so long and fluently, for a return of his affection, that Mrs. Porchester came down before an answer had been won. Her entrance gave Stella the means of evading it for the time, and she took care not to give him another chance before they all went to Morlands. He was satisfied with having obtained a hearing, and judiciously forbore to press her further.

The little Grahams were in the full delight of a game of croquet with some half-dozen small people, whose arrival had already inaugurated the fête. Mrs. Lyndsay was amusing herself by assisting them, and informed the new comers that Miss Clarendon had been a little fractious that morning, and absorbed her mamma entirely. A council of matrons was already sitting on the case, but of course Mrs. Porchester would be admitted. Before Mrs. Porchester could make her way up-stairs, Marion came down. She, too, was surprised to see Gervase; and his easy apologies, calling for hospitable welcome as a matter of course, irritated her beyond power of concealment. He saw it plainly enough, but he had made up his mind to remain, and she had no choice, but to beg he would occupy his old quarters as usual.

Stella took the first opportunity of drawing her aside.
“It was not my doing, Marion. I suspect he knows everything I do, or you either; and when we would not invite him, resolved to come uninvited. I have long thought Jones was a spy, and now I know it.”

“Why then do you not send her away?”

“Because, my dear, we should have to pay her wages. Why do I not send him away too, .but because I do not know how soon I may be driven to accept him? You would not suppose, to look at me, what letters I have had to write this morning. Marion, you promised me help, but you never gave it.”

“Roland has been away,” murmured Marion, with downcast eyes.

“When do you expect him back?”

“He may appear any day. I heard from him this morning, and he says, by the time I received his letter he would be on his way home; so I cannot write to him.”

“And you cannot help me, Marion? I am ashamed to ask you, but two or three hundred pounds just now would be of more value than thousands at another time. I could pay the most urgent cases something on account, and then I should have some peace. And what would a sum like that be to Roland?”

“If I had it to give you—if I had any right,” faltered Marion, whose agitation had increased with every word, “I would not hesitate; but you must believe me—I can do nothing till Roland comes home—and I dare not promise it, even then.”

“You have promised already,” said Stella, reproachfully.

“I have promised to do what I could—that I promise still, but no more. Do not ask me again.”

“I certainly will not. It is the first time I ever did ask such a favour, and if I had not felt I was speaking to a sister and friend, I should not have asked it at all. Pray think no more about it; it is of no consequence. What is that tiresome dog fidgeting about?”

For Nelson had come into the morning-room, and

after snuffing in every direction with an uneasy air, began pawing his mistress, as if to attract her attention.

"He wants to be let out for a run. Come Nelson!" said Mrs. Clarendon, hastily opening the window, "out, good dog, fetch!"

But neither "out" nor "fetch," answered the good dog's purpose; he declined going into the garden, and continued to fawn on Marion. "He wants water, perhaps," said she, moving to the door; and directly she did so, he began to bound with joy. In the doorway stood Gervase Wray.

"I found Nelson lying before the private door," he said, in a low voice, "and when I patted him he came off to look for you. How tenacious a dog's memory is! Let us see where he wants you to go."

Marion shrank back. Nelson took hold of her dress, and tried to pull her on.

"You must go with him," said Stella, "if only out of curiosity;" and they both accompanied her, as she reluctantly followed Nelson to his former post at the door of the secluded apartments. Here he stopped, and began scratching vigorously.

"He wants to go in," observed Gervase, quietly.

"He ought to know better," said Marion. "Nelson! Down directly, sir!"

Nelson ceased scratching, but snuffed under the door, and sat down with his ears put back, and his eyes full of expectation.

"He smells rats, perhaps," suggested Stella. "Why not go in and see if there is anything?"

Marion made no reply, but walking on, called Richards to take Nelson and shut him up—a mandate that was not very easy to obey, as his reluctance was extreme; but his mistress was inexorable. The sounds of carriage-wheels driving up compelled her to repair to the drawing-room, and Gervase and Stella walked into the garden. "What do you think?" he asked, when they were safely out of hearing; "is she not rather odd and excited to-day?"

"I think she is."

"Do you know, I am afraid she has been imposed upon ; she is very generous, and I know Roland allows her to draw for what she pleases. That person I told you of, for instance, he could not have much claim on her, and I know she was very liberal to him, for he boasted of it."

He stole a glance at Stella's burning face, and saw the shaft had told. "She could give to a man like that, and pretend to me that she could do nothing in Roland's absence !" thought Miss Porchester, and she bit her lip, and began to talk gaily on other matters. Mr. Wray followed her lead, and in the rapid arrival of guests, Stella's attention was soon devoted, perforce ; but her companion being less in request, watched his opportunity, and went round to the stables. He was so well known as the friend of the family, that all the servants were ready to do his bidding, and no difficulty was made about the release of Nelson. The dog, who had been howling ever since his incarceration, jumped upon him in delight at regaining his liberty ; and after snuffing about a few minutes, trotted off into the house. Gervase followed, and found him watching as before.

"Now, what can this mean ?" thought he, as he stood observing the dog's movements. "Good old fellow—seek ! fetch him out !"

Nelson began to scratch the door, and finding it to no purpose, gave an impatient howl. His mistress heard it from the drawing-room, and came in a moment. "Nelson ! come away, sir ! Who let him loose without my leave ?"

"It was my fault, Mrs. Clarendon ; the poor dog yelled so pitiously, I thought I would give him a run, but he slipped away, and came back here. I should really be inclined to think you must have rats on this floor."

"I cannot have him disturbing the house in this way," said Marion ; "come here, Nelson, come !" The dog obeyed reluctantly. She led the way to a little room, where Roland stowed away whips, fishing-tackle, and great-coats, and taking one of the latter, laid it on the

floor. "Watch, Nelson!" The dog smelt the coat, walked round it inquisitively, and finally lay down upon it, with his ears back, and his eyes on his mistress.

"He will not stir now till I bid him," said she; "I would advise no one to try and take that coat away."

"Nelson owns your power, as we all do," said Gervase Wray, smiling; "I only wish it were sometimes exercised for me."

"In what way?"

"In the way that would ensure my happiness. You have great influence over Miss Porchester—if I could only think you were my friend!"

"My husband's friend must be mine, Mr. Wray, but if Miss Porchester does not love you, what good would my influence do?"

"I believe I should have a chance, if I had some one at hand to plead for me; and, Mrs. Clarendon, no one can be that friend but yourself."

Marion shook her head. "You must not ask me; it is not in my power."

"You are only a friend in name, then?"

"In deed also, I hope, should you really want me. It would be no friendship to persuade my cousin to marry you unless she loved you first."

"I would take my chance of that—I would win her afterwards—will you try?"

"On no account whatever. I am sorry to be obliged to say this; if you have any regard for me, you will not ask it again. I hope you will find everything comfortable in your room—they tell me you have not brought your servant."

"No; he came with me as far as the station, and there he met a *compatriote*, and I gave him leave to go back with him."

"You are indeed an indulgent master."

"I believe I am; there might be a little self-interest in my indulgence, for I had reason to suspect the other fellow was in possession of information I wished to acquire, and Auguste will do his best to get it out of him."

"Was the person any one I know?" asked Marion, steadily.

"I believe you may remember the name—Lepeletier."

"Yes, I do indeed. What made you suspect he knew anything worth knowing?"

"I had my reasons. At any rate, there is no harm done by making sure. Auguste is like a bloodhound on the trail of a secret, and he will not show his face to me till he has followed it up."

"Did he tell you that he had seen me?"

Wray had not expected this question. "Yes," he replied, with a slight change of colour.

"I thought so, by your manner; you were waiting to see if that were a secret too. He came last night to ask me for money, which he said Mr. Saville had borrowed. My uncle settled with him this morning, and sent him away."

"Indeed! I wonder you gave him anything in Clarendon's absence."

"I believe I am the best judge of that. Perhaps, if you let Auguste know what I have told you, it will satisfy his curiosity without further trouble."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Clarendon; but with a man like that you may be sure there is always something that does not at first appear. One of his objects may have been to extort your money—what else he had in view we shall learn by-and-by. It is rather a rash thing to begin paying such demands without investigation."

"I know it is, but I have done it, and I wish you would tell Auguste to let him alone. No good can come of any intercourse with him, and he is as likely as not to rob the poor fellow, if he persuades him to play."

"If I had known you had been paying him on demand, I should certainly have kept them apart, for Auguste, in strict confidence, has a similar grievance on his mind, and he will think it hard that one should be removed and not another."

"What is his claim?" asked Marion, with a sigh. The

look of patient suffering in her face would at any other time have moved his compassionate interest—now it only made him more suspicious.

“I do not quite know the amount, but I believe it is rather more than a thousand francs—forty pounds—a trifle to us, but being all his savings, a great loss to him.”

“Write to him, Mr. Wray, by this post, will you, and tell him you have named it to me, and that I will let him have the money, on condition of his having nothing to do with M. Lepelletier. He will not venture to deceive you on that point, I suppose, and I think you will agree with me that no good can arise from their being together.”

“You make this a condition, then?”

“Certainly; I have paid M. Lepelletier quite enough—I have no wish to tempt him to plunder a poor servant.”

“I honour your generosity and frankness; I will write at once.”

He turned into the library, wrote his note, and then strolled into the grounds to find Stella. She was waiting for her turn at croquet, and seemed unwilling to be drawn aside.

“Did I not tell you how generous Mrs. Clarendon can be? Read that.”

Stella read, and gave it back impatiently.

“Did you really ask her to do it?”

“I only told her, as she had paid one claimant, the other would feel ill used, and that was her reply. You look as if it disgusted you.”

“I feel disgusted with everybody—you are all alike, and I can understand none of you.”

“Do you not understand what this means? It is to stop Auguste’s investigations. There is some mystery going on; what it is, I cannot pretend to say, but I am convinced of one thing,” he lowered his voice, and looked cautiously round, “whatever it may be, it is connected with Harcourt’s rooms.”



CHAPTER XIX.

HOW ROLAND FOUND WHAT HE SOUGHT.

THE day wore on, and the fête was in full progress. Everybody pronounced it a complete success, so far; and all were doing their best, as the evening advanced, to carry it successfully to an end. Long had it been since the ball-room had echoed with the sound of gay feet and spirited music; and though it was longer than the numbers of the party required, no one found fault with having too much space. It was not a ball, and therefore nobody expected to be crushed, and the children danced with the elders, and stoutly repudiating the notion of fatigue, decided that Morlands was some ten degrees better than fairyland. The little Grahams had never spent such a day of bliss: they had seen all the horses, all the fancy poultry, the dairy, and the gardens; they had played croquet, and rowed in the boat, and had beautiful things to eat, at the long table, as if they had been grown up; and now they were staying up "ever so late," to dance with tall gentlemen, with the alluring prospect of supper by-and-by. They wished there could be a christening fête at Morlands once a week—their only drawback had been the seclusion of the baby. That poor little innocent, in whose honour they were enjoying themselves, had been far too fretful all day to be brought among the guests; and anxiety on her account added, in no small degree, to the burden that sat too heavily on the young mother to be entirely concealed. Mrs. Brudenell did her best for her, by devoting herself to the child up-stairs, and Stella and Mrs. Lyndsay were equally zealous below; but not the less did she feel as if the day would never be over, and that to be rid of all her joyous visitors would be a relief beyond price. She was kneeling by her aunt, across whose lap the little one was lying, and they were agreeing that it would be a satisfaction to see Dr. Wartop, when Mrs. Peters put her head in, and whispered a request to speak to her mistress.

"Come in, Peters ; we are alone," said Marion.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am—if I could speak to you here——"

Marion looked at her aunt, and hurried to obey the summons. The colloquy was not long, but it had driven all the colour from her cheeks when she returned.

"I have sent for him," she whispered. Mrs. Brudenell turned pale herself.

"Is it necessary——?" Marion bowed her head, and looked wistfully at the baby.

"I must go," she said, slowly, "and if it be what she thinks, and what I fear—you will help me to see my duty. Can I have done her harm already?"

"I trust not, darling; do not frighten yourself. The calmer you are, the better it will be for you both. Perhaps it would be more prudent not to take her till you are sure. I will not leave her a moment, so go down, and show yourself. You can explain to some of them that the pet is not well, and they will think nothing of your sending for the Doctor."

"Oh, here is our hostess at last!" said Mrs. Lyndsay, as Marion appeared in the ball-room. "I do think we are very cruel to go on amusing ourselves when you are so anxious. How is the dear child now?"

"Not well ; I have sent for our Doctor—my aunt thinks it quite right to do so."

"And you, poor thing, wish us all anywhere out of the way, for keeping you from your darling. But I hope she will be all right to-morrow. Mrs. Porchester says it is nothing to make you uneasy. How charmingly everything has gone off ! Stella has excelled herself, and it is easy to see who is her slave. Do you think I might meddle in that matter as I did in another, and advise imprudence as the best wisdom ?"

Marion smiled, but not in assent.

"To marry on love only may be imprudent—but to marry on money only——"

"Might be madness, you think. Perhaps I had better let well alone. I am quite content with my one success. You were very ungrateful, though, for we never had a

secretary to our mind, and my father always declares Roland was just what he wanted. I wish you were obliged to retrench, and required a small addition to your income."

"Tell me, Florence," said Marion, in a low, hurried tone, "if my husband should feel he wanted work and wished for an appointment, could he really get one?"

"Get one? No doubt he could, but such an appointment as he would care to accept is not vacant every day."

"I mean something like the secretaryship—supposing he wished for such occupation."

"My dear, if he were but crazy enough to wish for that, we should dance for joy. I want to see my father made comfortable with a real gentleman about him, and such a good fellow as Roland would be too great luck to hope for. I can safely promise you the refusal of it, I dare say, if your husband's time as a country gentleman hangs heavy on his hands."

"Mrs. Clarendon," whispered a voice in her ear, "did you see Nelson just now?"

"No; I thought he was in the stable. I sent him there to have his supper."

"He has forced his way out, then, and is again at that door. I wonder you can think of going to bed to-night with such a mystery unsolved."

"If you are nervous about it, Mr. Wray, I dare say Mrs. Porchester would give you a bed at the White House. Shall I ask her?"

He made no reply, and took the first opportunity of passing on.

"You were quite right to put him down," said Mrs. Lyndsay; "he is too inquisitive by half. I hate men to be always prying into everything one does, and his curiosity is an insatiable gulf. But tell me, dear, are those really the rooms where poor Harcourt used to shut himself up? My father thought they were, but was not sure."

"They are," said Marion.

"Might we see them, do you think? I should like it

so much. I was very fond of the poor fellow when we were children—he was not a man generally understood, or appreciated."

"I cannot show the rooms to any one in Roland's absence."

"Really? Not even to me?"

"Not even to you, my dear Florence, kind as you have always been to me. No one ever goes into them but myself and my housekeeper."

"Do you think I should be less discreet, or less reverent in my poor cousin's rooms, than good Mrs. Peters?"

"No; but you are a stranger there, and she is not."

"Well, I will not be intrusive. Does Stella know those rooms?"

"She may have seen them formerly—never since——"

"Ah, very well, I will not ask you again. I am sorry I have teased so much already."

And meeting Stella soon afterwards, she told her the purport of their conversation, which Stella, in turn, repeated in the course of the evening to Mr. Wray.

A little while after supper, a rumour circulated among the guests, that the Doctor was in the house, and very uneasy about the dear little baby. The music ceased, the dancers stood about in whispering dismay, and every one asked questions of those who were supposed to have special means of information, without anybody being able to give satisfactory answers. The hostess had disappeared entirely, and those who had ventured on expeditions of inquiry had not been allowed to disturb the conference in Mrs. Clarendon's room, where the child now was. At last, to the general relief, Mrs. Brudenell appeared, and as soon as she could make herself heard in the clamour that surrounded her, explained that Dr. Wartop could not exactly pronounce on the baby's attack yet—but he was going to remain for the night, and, as the quieter the house was kept the better, it would be as well that the party should break up at once. Mrs. Graham would go back to the Vicarage with her young folks, and take the management of the house, as she herself must remain with Marion.

Regrets and alarm were universal, and old Mr. Percival eagerly drew her aside to ask if it would not be better for Mrs. Clarendon to have no guests on her mind, and might he be permitted to invite them to the Hall? On her owning that it would be the best plan, he proceeded to urge it on the General and Mrs. Lyndsay, and such of the visitors as were to sleep at Morlands; and though there was some demur at first, at leaving Marion in such trouble, it was finally decided that it might be greater kindness than remaining. No time was lost in making the needful arrangements. All agreed, with the exception of Gervase Wray, who resisted persuasion and argument, simply maintaining that in Roland's absence he might possibly be useful; and therefore, unless turned out as an incumbrance, he should prefer to stay. And as no one could do that, he did stay, and saw the last lights of the deserted banquet-hall put out by Richards, and yet lingered about the room, as if the scent of fading flowers and extinguished wax-candles had a more soothing charm than is usually attributed thereto. Here Mr. Brudenell found him, after seeing his friends home.

"This is dull work for you, Mr. Wray. Do not stay here in the dark; there are lights in the library, and I shall be glad to join you there, as we must give Dr. Wartop some supper presently."

"I have no wish for any supper, thank you, sir."

"But the Doctor has, and I must ask you to act as host in Roland's absence. I would stay to-night if I could, but I cannot leave my own guests quite deserted."

He had drawn Wray on while speaking, and they were soon in the library, where the butler was placing a tray of refreshments.

"It is a pity you should stay from your friends," said Gervase. "You look very tired as it is. Trust to me—I will take care of the Doctor."

"Thank you; then I will just speak to my wife, and send him down to you."

As soon as the Vicar had left him, Mr. Wray rang the bell. "Richards, where is Nelson?"

"In the stable, sir."

"I hate his being there, poor fellow. Just have him put in my room, will you? I am never quite comfortable without a dog near me."

Richards bowed; he had long been used to take Mr. Wray's orders, and never thought of disputing them. By-and-by came Dr. Wartop, but in no caustic, fault-finding humour. He was silent, grave, almost gentle, and very thirsty. Gervase Wray was alarmed by these symptoms, and after vainly endeavouring to rouse his companion to something like his usual frank vivacity of speech, asked if he had any fears about the infant?

"Yes," quoth the Doctor.

"Is it then so bad a case already?" asked Wray, really shocked.

"I do not know what you mean by 'so bad,' but we want the father home. How is one to get at him?"

"He is on his way home, we believe."

"Do you know what route he will take?"

"No; Mrs. Clarendon will probably hear to-morrow."

"Ah! Well, sir, I recommend you now to go to bed, and let the poor servants do the same. There will be nothing for any of you to do to-night."

"Doctor, how is Mrs. Clarendon herself?"

"Why do you ask, when you have been with her all day?"

"Just for that reason; she seemed to me not quite herself. Her friends went away really uneasy about her."

"They were quite right," said Dr. Wartop, gravely; "and I shall keep her quiet to-morrow. If people will give parties, and stand about all day, when they have young children to nurse," added he, with a sudden burst of his old spleen, "it is not to be wondered at if they are ill, and keep one up all night to see after them. Do not let us keep *you* up, though, Mr. Wray, as we may want to make you useful to-morrow. I shall be glad to have the house quiet. The shutting of doors and tramping along galleries are the very worst things that a patient can fight against."

So Gervase Wray was fain to go to his room, and,

with Nelson for company, sat patiently waiting till the house was perfectly still. About two o'clock he opened his door, and listened ; not a sound could he hear but Nelson's tail lazily beating the floor, as he watched him from his curled-up attitude of rest. Wray left his room and glanced over the balusters of the wide staircase—as he did, he saw the glimmer of a moving light below. It was but momentary—then all was dark as before. He stepped back to his room for a candle, whistled softly to the dog, who took some rousing before he would move, and went down with him to the door which Nelson had watched in the day. “ Seek, good dog,” he whispered, patting him on the back. Nelson sought—smelt—listened—and took him by surprise with a fierce and angry fit of barking, quite beyond Wray's power to silence. The door opened suddenly, and Marion stood before him. Pale, almost ghastly, as her face was when the light fell upon it, it flushed in a moment as she recognised her visitor.

“ What does this mean ? What are you doing here, Mr. Wray ? Why do you bring the dog here again ? ”

He began an incoherent apology, to which she gave no heed.

“ Take him away—take him away,” she said, as Nelson fawned upon her for admittance, “ and go back to your room. I could not have believed this of you ; but excuses only make it worse. Go, sir, this moment ! ”

She had closed the door behind her, and stood waiting for him to obey.

“ You mistake me, Mrs. Clarendon,” he said, with some humility ; “ I could not sleep for anxiety, and—and I thought I heard some one breaking into the house—and so——”

“ And so you fetched the dog to bark at this door, which you knew to be locked. I am sorry you have been disturbed, Mr. Wray ; now you are satisfied that there are no thieves in the house, perhaps you will sleep better.”

“ I beg your pardon, Mrs. Clarendon—I am far from satisfied—I am more alarmed than I was before.” He

paused, and held the light so as to read her countenance more distinctly. He had already noted that she was in a plain morning dress, instead of the one she had worn in the evening. "I am more alarmed than if I had found a thief in the house, for what he took you might replace ; but if it were possible that, from a false generosity, an overstrained mercy, you had been induced to risk your husband's anger to save a miscreant——"

"Be silent, sir !" she said, with flashing eyes. "No one shall presume to speak so to me in my own house ! Oh no, Mr. Wray, I did not mean to be so hasty—I have no right to be so imperious—but you try me beyond my patience, and I cannot bear much more."

"My respect forbids me to reply," he said, with a bow, as he retired, leaving her standing before the door, where she remained till he was out of sight.

He was bitterly chagrined by this incident ; it placed him in an awkward position in a house where he had always been careful to maintain an easy one ; and he was quite aware that if the story were told, his vague suspicions would not appear a satisfactory reason for playing the spy on his hostess in the middle of the night. The more he thought it over, the more convinced he was that something secret was going on, and that his conjecture was the true one ; but he had so completely put himself in the wrong, that he did not like the prospect of facing Marion in the morning, and began to feel something towards her very like hatred. He was not a malevolent man, but he was small-souled, and had been long accustomed to do little mean things, of which he was not ashamed, because they were cleverly disguised, and that small soul felt now sorely aggrieved, and longed for a fair opening for retaliation. Morning broke while he was considering what to do, and with the light came a visitor to his room—it was Dr. Wartop.

"I have just come to tell you, Mr. Wray, how sorry I am you were disturbed last night. I found I had forgotten some medicine I meant to bring with me, and I thought I might find some in poor Clarendon's den. He was fond of dabbling in medicine, as well as in other

things. I had no idea we were so noisy as to rouse you and Nelson. You startled Mrs. Clarendon, by the way, and she has not yet got over it."

"I am very sorry; pray make her my best apologies. What of the child?"

"The child is better; I am more anxious about the mother. She will keep her room to-day, and I should strongly advise you not to stay. It only makes her anxious and nervous to have any one in the house to think about."

"I quite understand, Doctor, and I shall start as soon as the letters have come in. I heartily wish Clarendon were come home."

He rang the bell, requested some breakfast immediately, and a carriage to take him to the station, as soon as the post-bag had been delivered, which always appeared at eight. As he expected, among a packet of letters forwarded from his lodgings, was one from Roland, telling him he might be in London any day, and should put up at his old quarters, until he had had an interview with the authorities of the detective police: he had reason to believe the assassin had returned to England, and if so, he would find him, alive or dead. Wray read this over two or three times, then called the servant to take down his portmanteau, and left Morlands without again seeing any of its inmates.

He reached his lodgings early in the day; found that his servant was out, and nothing had been seen of Mr. Clarendon. He was in time still, at any rate, and he wrote his letters, and waited impatiently for the appearance of his valet. Still, no valet came, and he made more inquiries. Auguste had arrived the evening before, and announced his intention of sleeping there, but went out again soon after, and did not return till five in the morning—stayed an hour, and went away again, in a cab, taking some boxes with him.

"Had he heard from me?" asked Wray of his informant.

"No, sir, I think not; at least, there is a letter below that came for him after he had left. He was gone before post time, and we have seen nothing of him since."

A misgiving seized Gervase Wray ; he went into his bedroom, looked into his drawers, and then ran back to examine his writing-table. All had been ransacked, and everything of value was gone.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day—a day that had been oppressively hot, very like the one on which Marion had first come to Stourbrooke—when Widow Trail awoke from a short doze into which she had fallen after hours of suffering ; and turning her eyes towards the light, perceived Cecil Percival standing at a little distance.

“ Won’t she come ? ” was the question her lips tried to frame, but they were so dry and parched, the words were hardly to be heard. He knew her meaning, and having gently moistened her mouth, smiled as he said, “ I told you she would, and here she is. She has left her sick child to come to you, because you ask it, so we must not keep her long.”

“ I’ll not keep her long—I’ll trouble none o’ you long—but I wanted to see her again—yes, I did.” And as Marion came slowly forward, and stood by the bed, the old woman’s eyes rested upon her with a pleading in their gaze that gave her dull features a transient dignity.

“ I’m going fast, my deary, I am—I shan’t trouble anybody much longer.”

“ You are in less pain, I hope ? ” said Marion. There was a convulsive aching in her throat that would hardly allow her to speak.

“ I’m very bad, that’s what I am, and I can’t die—no, I can’t till you ease my mind, deary. I know it’s hard what I’m going to ask, but will you, will you now——” She got hold of the young lady’s wrist, and clutched it with her yellow, bony fingers—“ will you try and not think too badly of my poor Bob ? I know he wur a wild one—he allus wur—and minded nobody—but if you’d heard how he talked of the Squire, you’d never believe he’d go for to do him a mischief, never. He couldn’t abide your master, that he couldn’t—but Mr. Clarendon—I don’t think he’d ha’ touched a hair of his head—

leastways, if he did, it wurn't Bob himself, it wur the drink, that's what it wur ; and when the drink gets into a man—oh deary, deary me ! haven't I seen enough o' what comes o' that ? It's a hard world, a very hard world, for poor old bodies. I'm glad to get out of it, and they'll all be glad to be rid o' me."

" You are going to a better, I hope."

" 'Deed, and I hope so too, my deary, or it won't be worth while to go at all. And if you'd only ease my mine, as I wur saying, I'd just like a bit of prayer, and not trouble none o' you any more. You will try, won't you, deary ?"

The large tears that had been gathering in Marion's eyes dropped heavily on her cheeks, as she knelt down by the bed.

" Will you," she said, " forgive us in return, if we have been unjust to him ?"

Percival came a step nearer, and bent down to hear the answer. It came out with almost a snarl. " No, I won't ! If you've been unjust to my poor lad, it will be visited upon you—ay, it will ! There's One who cares for the poor, and He'll see him righted, though I shan't. There's Mr. Percival will tell you that—ask him !"

Marion looked up at Cecil with eyes that seemed imploring his mercy. Their glances met, and before the grave, alarmed questioning of his, her head drooped sadly, and she covered her face with her hands. The old woman was touched with her distress.

" Lawks, my poor lovey, I didn't mean to say nothin' against you, nor yet your master. They say he's a hasty young gentleman, but I dare say he's a kind one ; they're mostly kind when they has what they wants, and keeps away from the drink. Oh, I'm thirsty—give me some'at." Marion gave her some spoonfuls of lemonade. " That's good, thank ye kindly. The Lord will pay it back to you ; and you'll try and think kindly of poor Bob, won't you ?"

" I promise you faithfully," said Marion.

" Then now I'm easy, and if he'll read me a bit o' prayer, I'll go to sleep."

Again Marion looked at Mr. Percival, expecting him to begin at once, but he remained silent and motionless. The old woman expressed no surprise ; she was gradually becoming torpid ; but the silence perplexed Mrs. Clarendon, and she whispered nervously, “ Will you not do as she asks ? ”

“ God help me ! ” was all his answer, and he burst into an agony of such tears as she had never seen before.

“ God help us all,” she repeated, “ for we all need help sorely ; but she is going fast, and it will soon be too late. Who can comfort her if you cannot ? ”

“ What right have I to give comfort, or speak peace ? How can I do the priest’s office with a lie in my right hand ? Can you answer me that ? No, how should you, innocent and true as you are ? Go, you have done your part ; your uncle will soon be here, and to his faithful hands the work shall be left, for which mine are utterly unworthy.”

Even as he spoke, the Vicar’s slow step was on the stairs, and as he entered the sick-chamber, his lips pronounced the blessing for which all three were thirsting in vain.

The short service was over, and Marion was moving to the door.

“ If you will wait for me below, my love,” said her uncle, “ I will see you home. I have a word to say to Percival first.”

She went below, and would have waited, feeling exhausted in body and mind, but Mrs. Andrews, who was an old ally of Mrs. Brudenell’s, had been on the watch, and came out directly she appeared.

“ Oh, Mrs. Clarendon, ma’am, if you please, Mr. Clarendon was here just a minute or two ago, and he asked how Mr. Percival was, and I told him you was both with the poor sick body up-stairs, and you’ll excuse my telling you, ma’am, though it do seem a liberty, but he was not quite pleased, and he has driven on home, and I thought you’d rather know directly, you see, ma’am. I beg your pardon and his, I’m sure, for being so bold.”

She had said quite enough; Marion almost flew out of the house, and along her way home; the distance seeming threefold its usual length, and her limbs as if made of lead. The fly was not out of sight; Roland was stopping it now to speak to Stella and Mrs. Lyndsay; what would they be telling him? Oh, if she could only make him stop! He was getting out to walk with them —would he not even look round to see if she was coming? Yes, he had turned, he saw her, they were waiting; and now he came striding back to meet her, and his face was flushed and dark, and his lips tightly compressed. He said not a word, but offered his arm, which she took and clung to, panting and nearly spent. Happen what might, condemn her unheard as he seemed disposed to do, there was relief and comfort in his presence that his anger could not quite take away. Not a word was spoken, as they walked on to join their relations, who were watching the meeting with no small curiosity.

"It is a real comfort to see you out, Marion," said Mrs. Lyndsay, "for it is a proof baby is better. I do believe you only wanted to get rid of us, and primed the Doctor to give the alarm. Now we may be admitted again, I hope, and judge for ourselves."

"Not to-day," said Marion, faintly; "she is not yet well enough to be disturbed; we are not sure yet what it will prove to be."

"Yet you left her to go *there*," murmured Roland, in a tone that no one heard but herself, and was rather hard to bear.

"It was time Roland came back," observed Stella, "for Morlands has been lately like a Castle of Udolpho. Gervase Wray, like a *preux chevalier*, tried sleeping in it, but was nearly throttled in the night by old Nelson, and fled at cock-crow, leaving no trace behind. Do you bring any news of the recreant, Roland?"

"Yes; that Auguste has robbed him, not only of money and plate, but of private papers and letters, which Wray thinks the greater loss of the two—for some of them were yours."

"So?" said Mrs. Lyndsay, archly, glancing at Miss

Porchester, whose face had darkened visibly ; “ no wonder the poor man is in despair. Well, we must hope he will catch the thief ; and now we will leave you two to talk about the baby in peace, which you are longing to do. I am going to dine at the White House, as Mr. Percival has taken my father to a club dinner at some old inn, famous for its port wine. It will be a miracle if he escapes the gout. By the way, Marion, my dear, there is an appointment vacant now, if you will have it. You can let me know to-morrow. Only be in time, for these good things are snapped up in a moment.”

In this style they talked, Marion alone remaining silent, till they reached the gate into the grounds ; here the two ladies left them, to walk across the path, and the Clarendons hurried on to the house. It was all Marion could do, and yet even Roland was not more impatient for its shelter than she was. He asked no questions till he had brought her into the library, and given her a glass of wine and water ; but he stood by her as she drank it, with a severity in his face that showed how keenly he felt.

“ Can you answer me now, Marion ? ” he said, when he saw she was a little recovered.

“ Roland, dearest, do not be angry with me—I could not help it—I have a great deal to tell you, if you will only give me time and courage.”

“ Courage, Marion ? what have you to fear with me ? ” He saw she was faint with agitation, but it only served to excite him the more. “ Do you think I care for what Gervase chose to say ? Do you think I would stand and hear it said that you had mysteries and secrets which you were afraid of his finding out—actually implying that, out of goodness of heart, you might have been induced to have anything to do with that execrable—”

“ Hush, hush, my dearest—God forgive you the word ! He will, for you know not what you do.”

And she threw herself on his breast, and sobbed hysterically, unable, at first, to control her emotion, although she knew every moment’s delay added to the fever of irritated impatience, which all his tenderness could not quite overcome. The more she sobbed and trembled, the darker his suspicions became.

"Marion," he said, sternly, "there is only one thing possible for you to have done, which it would be impossible for me to forgive. When Wray hinted at it, I nearly knocked him down—we shall never be again the friends we were—and if I thought such things had been done in this house—in those rooms—sacred to that dear memory which I have sworn to see avenged——"

"Stop, Roland, stop—I must not hear that word—it is not for us. Come with me, and I will show you why."

Her paleness had given place to a sudden glow of excitement, and her husband was startled by the strange expression of her eyes, in which pity, terror, grief, and gladness, seemed striving for the mastery by turns. It silenced the question on his lips, and obeying her gesture of caution, he followed in increasing wonder and dread—dread that became almost insupportable when she opened the private-door, and secured it behind them as soon as they had entered. "Marion! why have you dared to bring me here?"

"To tell you what I was afraid of any one overhearing. Roland, a great mercy has been granted to us, but it brings with it difficulty and danger. Have you strength and courage to command yourself—not for your own sake only?"

She had hoped that by guessing at her meaning he might escape the shock her experience had taught her to dread; but as if stung to sudden madness by confirmed suspicion, he seized her hands in his strong grasp, so passionately as to give her acute pain for some time afterwards. "I will never forgive you, Marion!" sounded like thunder in her ears, as he thrust her off, before she could speak again, and rushed past her into the work-room, where sat Dr. Wartop, mixing some powders.

"You here, too? Why are you not with the child? Who are you attending here without my leave, sir?"

"Hush, sir, if you please; it is *my* leave you will have to ask, before you go any farther. Mrs. Clarendon, does he know——?"

"Dearest Roland, only hear me one moment——" pleaded Marion, but she was cut short.

"I insist on seeing who is here—who is desecrating these rooms—who has dared—— Oh, merciful Heaven ! what is that ?"

For a voice from the inner room was calling, " Roland !" and it was the voice of Harcourt, his brother.

CHAPTER XX.

REUNITED.

THE first stunning shock of such a joy is almost as hard to bear as that of grief ; and Roland, though he did not lose his senses, never knew exactly what happened, till, by degrees, as full consciousness returned, he realised that he was kneeling by his brother's bed, and that their arms were locked round each other. What words passed between them in that first moment of reunion, their angels may have heard, but no one else ; even Marion drew reverently back, not to disturb such a foretaste of the promised bliss ; and though watching both so as to be ready with assistance the instant it was needed, did her best to help them to forget her. And at first she was forgotten ; there was no room in Roland's heart for any thought but of the risen from the dead. He could not recall that they had parted in anger, when they met in such a clasp of love ; and it was not till Harcourt murmured the word "forgiveness," that he remembered he had both to ask and to receive.

" Noll, dear old Noll—how could I ever think you unkind ? I know I often provoked you, but if you knew how I have grieved since I thought you dead—how every little thing I ever did to vex you has made my heart ache, you would forgive me. Do you remember my driving Stella against your orders ? I have often wished I had cut my hand off first. Where have you been ? How is it you escaped ? And why are you hidden

here, instead of being welcomed in your own house? What has Marion been thinking of?"

"Of what has not yet struck you, dear fellow," said Harcourt. His voice was weak, but mournfully earnest; and as his brother raised himself to look at him, he fixed his sunken eyes on his face, with a strange mixture of shame and pity. Roland gazed at him in wonder at first, but gradually, as he began to understand, the dazzling joy faded from his countenance, and a horror of great darkness came down upon his soul. Marion saw it coming; she had been waiting for that moment, and was directly by his side, with her arm on his shoulder.

"Roland, he is in danger—we must think of that only—we must command ourselves—no one must suspect he is here. No one knows it but Dr. Wartop, my uncle and aunt, and Peters, and they will stand by us through everything. He wants all our help, and all our love; and on whose should he rely, if not on yours and mine?"

Roland, who had crouched down by the bed, and buried his face between his arms, now lifted it up.

"Tell me the worst at once—what became of Trail?"

There was an expressive silence—his head sank lower than before.

"God is my witness," said Harcourt—no words can describe the sadness with which he spoke—"I had no intention to hurt him. We had walked a long way, and he had been drinking without my knowledge, and when I spoke sharply to him for his behaviour, he suddenly pulled out one of my pistols. I thought he must be going mad, and hit out at him—and then—and then—oh, Roland, Roland!" for the strong arm was encircling him once more, and Roland was weeping like a child—"when I saw him lie at my feet, and do what I might, I could not make him stir or breathe, it was hard work not to take that pistol, and follow him. I would have given my own life twice over to have brought back his. I would now, now I have seen you again, old fellow, and your precious wife. You are not jealous of my loving her, are you? For I can tell you I do. Come here, my guardian angel. You do not believe I was a murderer in

heart, do you? or that if I had been, I would have come here, even to die?"

His voice failed him; he had become very faint, and Dr. Wartop and Marion had some difficulty in reviving him again. The story of his calamity and subsequent fate, was therefore necessarily delayed; and as the Doctor exhorted quiet, and it was needful to avoid suspicion, the young parents left him for a while, and went up to consult together, and visit their darling.

Mrs. Brudenell was, as usual, at her post; the infant was rarely out of her arms, and her kind face looked weary and worn, from fatigue and sympathising anxiety. She carried the baby into Marion's room, and with doors locked, they talked in whispers of what had happened, and what was yet to do. So much had their full hearts to pour out to each other, that at first there were more tears than words; but the necessity of deciding on some plan of action, compelled them to self-control, and Marion was beginning to explain her own conduct, when she was stopped by her husband's burst of penitence for his harshness and ingratitude. So bitter was his self-reproach, that all her previous pain was forgotten in the endeavour to put him in charity with himself.

It was easier for her so to do, when she learned that Gervase Wray had overheard a few hurried words, spoken by herself to her uncle, on the day of the *fête*, which had given him the idea that she knew something of the fugitive assassin, and dreaded its coming to her husband's knowledge. The strange pertinacity of the dog had directed and strengthened his suspicions; and he had gone away persuaded that the unfortunate Trail, having thrown himself on her mercy, was being hidden by herself and her friends, till they could secretly arrange his escape. With a shudder Roland remembered how indignantly he had repelled the bare notion of any mercy being shown to the criminal, or any kindness to one who bore his name; and it required all the joy of Harcourt's restoration to enable his brother to bear up under the sense of shame brought by his unhappy deed. Long and anxiously did they consult, for seriously did it behove

them to consider what was to be done. For the moment they were tolerably secure : it was known in the household that while the baby's illness continued Dr. Wartop would occupy the private apartments ; and sundry hints had been thrown out by Peters of experiments and concoctions he was busy with among the poisons and apparatus always kept there, which would keep the most curious, as she said, from wishing to put their noses in the passage. The rooms occupied by Marion and the child, forming part of the wing Harcourt had built, were immediately over his hiding-place, and quite apart from the rest of the house; and though the first dread lest he had brought the seeds of a contagious disorder with him had been dispelled by his amendment, and that of the infant, the indisposition had been of service in keeping away visitors, and still served as a reason for forbidding the unauthorised intrusion of servants. But this state of things could not last ; any hour might bring discovery, and it was necessary to look all the contingencies at once in the face.

Harcourt was alive, and reconciled to him—nothing could quite mar the gladness of that thought ; and yet there were many others rising now that might well sadden and perplex the young husband and father. He was no longer master of Morlands, with wealth at command—nay, worse still, he had never been its lawful master ; and every farthing he had spent had been in violation of his brother's rights. How was he to stop now, or make restitution, without betraying Harcourt ? How, when it should be discovered that he had known of his existence, escape the disgrace of wilfully-committed fraud ? His tenants, his servants, his labourers—all were liable to suffer ; to what extent he could not yet surmise. He had no right to draw a single cheque, even to pay his housekeeping bills ; nothing was really his but the annuity settled on Marion, and the modest sum they had possessed between them when they married. And for Harcourt himself ; what could be done ? Who could advise him to make open acknowledgment of the truth, when they saw to what he had been driven by the mere dread of its being

known? Whether his case were as perilous, under the circumstances, as he believed, Roland could not venture to give an opinion; but he said, and his listeners agreed with him, that the right thing would be to confide in some eminent lawyer, and be guided by his advice. He should talk it over with the Vicar next day, and, if Harcourt did not object, go up to London in the evening; no correspondence would do—it was far too dangerous for anything but a personal interview. Oh, if some step could be devised by which the dear old boy's heart could be set at rest, Roland would care for nothing else—not even if they had all to leave England, and hide themselves with him in the Australian bush.

"We would get old Alexander to bespeak a colonial bishopric for Mr. Brudenell, Minnie, and we would all go off together, and take to sheep farming. I have a notion you would turn out a capital bushwoman; and Cecil might come out as a missionary, and starve on tea and damper to his heart's content. What would he say if he knew?"

"He would say, tell the truth at all hazards;" said Marion; "and were this his own case he would do it."

"So would I, but who is to judge for another? We shall know better what to think when he can give us the full particulars."

Late that night, when Roland was taking his turn of watching by the sick-bed, those particulars were given. Harcourt had shrunk from seeing his old friends; he had only endured the necessary presence of doctor and servant, because neither asked him a question upon the past—the one from professional reticence, the other from respect. But to his brother he was yearning to pour out all, and the relief of so doing was the first step towards his recovery.

"Wray told you, of course, how I left him that morning. I did not choose to confess how much money I had fooled away with Lepelletier, but I was resolved to have no more of it, and felt in that mood when nothing but violent exercise would serve my turn. That poor fellow provoked me at starting by sulkiness and dawdling.

Roland, I was wrong in his case from first to last ; I listened to no advice, and put him in a situation for which he was quite unfit—I humoured him here for my own amusement, and then was savage to find him drunken and disrespectful. I walked off without him, leaving him to follow : Lepelletier heard of my plan, and came after me, bringing poor Bob with him. Of course we played, and, whether he meant it or not, I won every stake, and then wished him good morning. Trail had been drinking most of the time, but as he could take a good deal without betraying himself, I did not notice his manner. When we reached the forester's lodge, where we rested, he wanted to sleep there, and I was resolved to push on. I had a mind to see the Wilde-See ; and the more he grumbled, the more determined it made me. My obstinacy, old fellow, as usual, led me wrong—it nearly cost Marion her life, God bless her!—and now it was to cost another in earnest. Roland, do you remember that night, that those two slept here for the first time ? I have often wondered since if it were only an old dream for the use of the poet and novelist, that idea of each man haying his Fylgia, his tutelary genius, both for evil and good ; and whether two such were not then sent to me, for my happiness and my ruin ?—Give me some of that stuff of Wartop's—it puts life into a man. He has been good to me, that crusty old fellow—handles me as tenderly as if he were my mother—never seems to remember that I am under a cloud—and yet it is heavy enough, and dark enough, God knows, who only can take it away.

Where was I ? Going up to the Wilde-See—wild enough, that spot, to please any one. I can see it as I lie here. We had a guide part of the way, and then scrambled on by ourselves ; it was evening when we reached the lake, and Trail began to swear at me for bringing him there. He was wet through, he said, with wading through the swampy ground, and he would go no farther for any one. I told him to hold his tongue, and do as he was bid ; and the madman cocked my own pistol. I struck him, and he dropped dead. I do not know how long I was there alone with him, trying

to bring him back to life. I know the moon had risen, and was shining on those cold dark waters, when I heard a man's step coming near, and could have blessed him for breaking that worse than solitude. He was a young peasant, a charcoal-burner's son, and, as he let out, in no good odour at home—had got into trouble with the police, and was loose to the ties of society. You wonder at my remembering all this ; my dear boy, there is not a single thing that happened that day which I have not gone over in my mind so many times, I have dreaded going mad on the subject, and telling it all to every one who came near. The fellow soon understood my case, and told me it was a bad one ; the police would think it a quarrel, and it would go hard with me. I had nearly made up my mind before he came. I was guilty of blood —no matter how—and I shrank, I cannot describe with what abject terror, from the scenes I must go through if I gave myself up. Better I had died by his hand than he by mine ; better I should die to you all, than bring disgrace on my father's name, on my own, and on yours. With the help of the youth, I went through it all ; we took off the poor fellow's clothes, tenderly enough, and wrapped him in my plaid, and buried him under a pile of logs, which the forester lighted. I changed my dress for his, putting my own into a bundle : you wonder at my nerve, perhaps ; but I was turned to stone, and felt none of those smaller tortures at the time. I rewarded my friend liberally, and he told me he should escape at once, and go to America. Then I walked on to Wildbad ; showed myself at the hotel, and in several shops, where I acted my part as if it were on the stage, talking broken German, and announcing the speedy arrival of my master. At one or two other places I took care to leave the same report ; I think I had some of the cunning of madness upon me at that time ; and after that I put on my own dress, and struck across France. I had money, and passports, and brains for emergencies, and wore several disguises before I quite baffled pursuit. I wished you to believe me dead, and meant never to be heard of again.

“I cannot describe the state of my mind through all

this ; but if a man can be insane without losing his faculties, I was. I lived and moved in a dream of horror, in which I seemed to be isolated from the rest of mankind, and compelled to pass existence alone. I had sufficiently strength left to refrain from brandy—the very smell of it reminded me of my long efforts by the lake, rubbing it into the dead man's temple, trying to force it between his teeth. Oh, when shall I ever forget that night ? Thank you, dear fellow—just a mouthful—your wife makes lemonade like Miss Nightingale, and it does me more good than if it were made by any one else.

"I was wandering one day through a village in the south of France, when I fell in with some Zouaves, and they proposed I should enlist. I passed myself as an American, and they told me they had all nations in their corps. People used to talk in the Crimean war of Eton men being found among them ; I cannot say I discovered any. They were eager for recruits, and asked no questions about my antecedents. I enlisted, and went with the regiment to Algeria. It would make a couple of good volumes if I wrote down my two years' experience under the Imperial eagles ; but a sick heart makes a poor hero. I was still in my dream-land of penance, and went through drudgery and drill as I had gone through everything else, from that hour at the Wilde-See. An officer took a fancy to me, for curing his horse when it was ill, and made me his servant. There was retribution in that, and it suited me. I learned to polish boots to a nicety—don't, dear fellow, don't"—as Roland's sobs broke in on the narrative ; "it was not much worse than flogging ; don't be unhappy about that. The work, the rations, the position, were nothing to the dull, gnawing pain at the heart—the slow fire in the brain.

"That came to a crisis at last ; cholera and dysentery carried off some files of our men, and I was ill in my turn, and lay for hours quiet in hospital, and by degrees began to come to myself, like the son in the parable. I used to think of you and Marion, and of Brudenell, and Percival, till I could imagine I heard you all in church—who knows? Perhaps I did, if what some believe be

true. I found many things true at last, which I had doubted before is that the doctor coming, to make me hold my tongue ? Don't let him in just yet. To lie here, and tell you everything like this, is worth all his potions, and you may let him know as much.

"I got up at last, but the surgeon pronounced me unfit for service ; lungs out of order, or something, and I had my discharge, and a passage to Marseilles. A sick soldier is always a pet among the people there, and wherever I went, I was kindly treated. I roughed it, of course, but that I was used to ; and in time I reached Paris. It was at a cheap *restaurant* there that I met with Lepelletier, down on his luck, and studying economy till he had replenished his purse. I could disguise myself from everybody else, but not from that fellow ; and he had been watching me some time before I was aware. I affected not to know him, and gave him the slip, in spite of his attempts to dog me ; but I read mischief in his eyes, and knew that he remembered his breakfast at Gernsbach. I was, by this time, nearly done for, and felt I must see you again before I died. I had promised Marion I would not meet her till I could do so as a brother should ; what a brother I had proved myself !—and yet, I did long for one kind look from those dear eyes of hers, as much as to feel your hand in mine again, old boy. Rather a difference in our muscles now ; I should think twice before I attempted to hold in a pair of young horses of your training. Have you got the greys back, by the way ?"

"Was it likely ?" asked Roland, reproachfully.

"Well, I did not know ; it was all my pride that made me part with them, because you could manage them, and I could not. I crossed the Channel, and walked here in what sort of dress you may imagine ; I changed my ragged regimentals for some slops at Calais. I had not much fear of recognition, only of not holding out long enough. I arrived here late, and I was loitering along the road, for when it came to the point, my heart began to fail ; and I saw Lepelletier coming to meet me. I guessed where he had been, and had just time to get out of his sight. I hid

myself in the park till I thought every one would be in bed, meaning then to try and let myself in by my private key, which I had taken abroad with me, and never parted with. How I had longed to be in here once more, if only to die in peace!—and yet I hesitated up to the last moment. I did not know but that you might have altered the rooms, or that the door might be bolted, and I should not be able to get in, and perhaps alarm the house. I ventured at last, and found myself face to face with Marion. How lovely she looked! I had seen nothing so sweet and good for so long, and felt so unworthy to touch even the hem of her dress, that between my shame and her terror, it was some little time before we could speak to each other. I am afraid I gave her a very severe shock, for when I was kneeling by her, and took her hands in mine, they were as cold as marble. I had to attend to her first, God bless her! but her turn soon came. As soon as she recovered herself, and understood how I came to be there, I had found a sister indeed. She was afraid to call even Peters, but she went herself, and fetched me food and coffee, and made my bed, and brought me all the comforts that had become forgotten luxuries, and never left me till she had done all a woman could do to keep my body and soul from sinking. We agreed that the Brudenells must be told; I only begged them not to come near me: till I knew whether you would receive me or not, I could not bear to be seen even by them. And here I have been ever since, and very ill I was at first; it has been terribly hot, and I was in such a high fever the other night, they had to send for Wartop. He says I may live yet; the question is, if I do, what is to be done next?"

"Noll, you know one thing—you are master here."

"Master? not I. I have abdicated to William and Mary, and I am not come back as a Pretender."

Roland shook his head, but would not agitate him by continuing on the subject. Exhausted with so much talking, Harcourt soon after fell asleep, and his brother watched by him till morning.

With the morning came an unexpected trouble though

one which it would not have been unreasonable to expect. Marion was ill—it was hoped only from fatigue and anxiety, but her state was such that it was absolutely necessary the baby should be removed, and Mrs. Brudenell was to take it to the Vicarage, and find it a nurse among her village friends. It was a heavy trial to both aunt and niece, but Dr. Wartop was imperative, and the young mother's fears for her little one's safety gave her courage to bear the separation, and the loss of Mrs. Brudenell's tender care. Neither owned to the other the thought uppermost in their minds—that if this illness had been brought in by the fugitive, it might prove serious. They spoke bravely at parting, and more bravely still to poor Roland, who needed all the comfort that could be given him, deprived of his wife's support just when he needed it most. He was a devoted nurse, and never left her except when he was required by Harcourt, to whom he had to carry as cheerful accounts as he could, in order to calm his anguish.

"I have brought a curse with me, and it falls on the innocent," was constantly on his lips, and again and again he would implore Roland's forgiveness, revealing more of his undying attachment to Marion than he knew, but in such a form that it excited compassionate indulgence, and not jealousy. The comfort of the Vicar's presence was denied to them both by the fear of carrying infection to the infant, and when Roland suggested confiding in Cecil, Harcourt shrank from the mention of his name.

"I will see no one—neither Percival nor Wray, nor even Stella. Let me but pick up strength enough to travel, and I will set you free, and none of you shall suffer another pang on my account," was his answer—so bitterly spoken, that his brother could say no more. It was Dr. Wartop whose blunt sense opened the fugitive's eyes to the true state of the predicament in which they were all placed.

"It is very well for you, sir, to sit there, and say you have abandoned your rights, and so forth; do you think honest people, like your brother and sister, will ever profit

by such an extraordinary complication of circumstances ? I know them both, and though for your safety's sake they go on now because they cannot help it, yet as soon as it possible, they will be striking tent, and starting somewhere, to live on the means, whatever that may be, that they can conscientiously call their own. Roland has been talking it over with me, and I know Mrs. Clarendon's mind was made up from the very first. A report has got about, somehow, that they are in difficulties, and it is said that it is owing to some connexion of your sister's—and when I saw the Squire the other day at Durningham, he began to sound me on the subject, so I rather encouraged the notion. It is perfectly true, and may make your brother's future course somewhat easier."

The consequence of this speech was, that when Harcourt next saw Roland, he urgently besought him, as soon as Marion could safely be left, to go up to London as they had agreed, lay the whole case before a first-rate lawyer, and bring him back with him to Morlands. It was becoming urgent that some such step should be taken, for another whisper had begun to circulate—how it had arisen no one knew—that there was some mystery connected with Dr. Wartop's residence in the private apartments ; the word "insanity" had been dropped, and there was no knowing to what such a rumour might grow. So when Marion was out of danger, and only the weakness left, for which the Doctor's care and Peters' watching could be trusted to provide, Roland reluctantly started on his anxious journey. Percival found out he was going, and met him at the station.

"I have no fears—you may shake hands with me," he said, as Clarendon was drawing back ; "I have a theory of my own about infection, though I cannot explain it to you now ; and I trust all that fear is over now, as your wife is better."

"She is better—or I should not be here."

"You know how it was she came to that poor woman's death-bed—I fear it was too much for her, but what could I do ?"

"You did right, perfectly right," said Roland, turning pale. "I did not know she was dead."

"She died that evening. I buried her at Durningham, as she desired."

"Thank you, Cecil: you are the best fellow that ever lived. I was very hard and cruel about that woman, but Marion did her duty, as she always does; and you helped her. I cannot stay to talk—I must go—"

"Something is the matter, or you would not leave her, I am sure."

"I am obliged to go up on urgent business—it has been delayed too long already. You will be at hand, Cecil, old fellow, if she should send for you?"

"Depend upon me. Roland, may I ask this—is it true what people say—that you are in difficulties?"

"In difficulties? I should think I was. I shall probably have to leave Morlands, and work for my wife and child. No great grievance either, you will say."

"I do say it. More—I am glad to hear it. You will be a happier man, and I trust a blessing will rest upon you, which you could never have here. If only I might share it!"

"You, Cecil? so good and earnest as you are?"

But Cecil had turned away, and the train came up before another word was spoken.



CHAPTER XXI.

MARION'S DREAM.

"AND Roland is gone, with his wife still confined to her bed? It must be urgent business indeed. And he told you himself he was in difficulties, poor fellow? I wonder how that can be, with his noble income. Is it possible that Marion could have been entangled in any of Mr. Saville's affairs?"

"It may be so," said Cecil; "I cannot tell."

He was sitting in the cool of the evening, by Stella's side, at the open window of the White House, with no sound near but those sweet rural murmurs, which are more soothing than silence; and though he had come in, intending only to stay half an hour, the longer he sat there, the more difficult he found it to depart. Her mother was taking her usual nap on the sofa, and Stella had never seemed so gentle, so accessible, since he had allowed her to feel that his happiness depended on her smile. She was sadder than was her usual wont, and if ever there is a time and season when sadness craves the relief of outpouring, and pride and reserve melt before sympathy, it is in the twilight of such an evening as this was.

"I am very sorry for Roland," Stella observed, after an interval of thoughtfulness; "I envied those two their lot a little while ago, but they are no happier than others, after all."

"You envied them, you say? Not their fortune, I am sure; you have too noble a spirit to covet money, or money's worth. What you did envy was the love that gave value to the rest, and which might have been yours, ¹ that very home."

"You are not to think that," she said, without appearing offended; "now that all is past and gone, I may frankly speak of it—I believe I misled others as well as myself—but there was never anything between me and my poor cousin beyond cousinly intimacy and preference. Nor, on looking back dispassionately on what I felt for him—sadly as I have mourned his loss—do I believe there ever would have been."

"Dare I believe you, Miss Porchester?"

"It will need some courage, and when you do believe, some charity. All I really cared for, was the gratification of my pride and ambition; and if I had married him, I should not have made him happy."

The tears were in her eyes, and her tone was sincere and humble. Percival sat some minutes without making any reply.

"I am over-bold in my questions," he said at last,

"but as your friend, I cannot help asking—is your present choice one to make *you* happy?"

She hid her face for a moment, then lifting it with sudden energy—"Happy I cannot say, in such a world as this—but that it would make me better, wiser, holier, that I am certain."

"Holier, with a man like Gervase Wray?"

She smiled in scorn through her tears, and as he looked in her face in the moonlight, he thought it was more beautiful than ever.

"Of Gervase Wray, whether he cares for me or not, I have learned lately what would break my heart if I loved him; as it is, we shall not quarrel, but I can never think of him again as a friend."

She did not explain why, and he did not ask. His heart was throbbing so painfully as almost to take away his breath.

"You have made a choice, and it is neither of those. Oh, Stella, Stella, if I were but less unworthy, I might hazard all, and grasp at a shadow of hope—but it comes too late for one who has fallen so grievously as I."

"Too late?" The words and the tone chilled Miss Porchester's heart; she trembled at what she had done, and could neither speak nor move. He took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Tell me, Stella, if you knew I had done wrong, and still durst not confess it, could you forgive me? Could you trust me again?"

She struggled to answer calmly, but she was choking with tears.

"I do not know—I cannot tell—it must depend on what you felt for me. You frighten me with your mysterious hints. If your conscience has so much to bear, what do you suppose has mine, who never, since I was a woman, had a thought of what was right, till you put it into my head? If I ever have a hope of being a shade better, which is only now and then, it will be to you I shall owe it; and to shake my faith in you now would be a bad business indeed."

He paused awhile, then whispered softly "Should you

be afraid of the night air? Would it hurt you to take a turn in the garden?"

"That I cannot tell unless I try."

They stepped out accordingly, and wandered along the gravel paths, a delicious breeze playing round their temples, laden with the sweets of the flowering shrubs around them. And there he confided to her his secret, and placed his fate in her hands—his one chance of happiness at her mercy.

How she received his confidence, how she used her mercy, startling and bewildering as his revelation was, may be inferred from the length of time the interview lasted. There was a great deal to talk over—much that was of serious import, and the dark masses of the Morlands woods lay full in her view the while; but the more they talked, the less easy it became to go back to the house. So there they lingered, longer than was prudent—but who was to remind them of prudence then? Prudence, had she begun to interfere at all, would have had too much to do, to think of dews and exhalations; and would probably have been as much heeded in the one case as in the other. Never were two people apparently less suited—never were prospects less free from obstructions and hindrances—but before they parted that night, they were pledged to each other heart and hand.

Late as it was when Cecil at last took leave, he felt too excited for rest, and wandered slowly through the park, musing on what he had done, as if in a happy dream from which he feared to wake, till he found himself at the little gate leading into the pleasure-ground. As he stopped to consider whether to pass through or go round, he thought he smelt burning, and moving a little farther, where the house could be seen, was horror-stricken to perceive a cloud of smoke and tongues of flame issuing from the upper windows. In a few minutes he had reached the entrance, and was ringing violently at the bell; then rushed to the stable-yard, where his shouts speedily roused the old watch-dog, whose barks seconded his efforts to waken the sleepers within. Strange how soundly people will sleep at times, when their lives

hang on a thread ! It seemed to Cecil as if he should never make himself heard ; but at last windows and doors opened, and heads were thrust out in alarm, and at the cry of "Fire !" female voices uttered responsive shrieks of dismay. Percival pressed forward as soon as he could obtain admittance, and made his way to the foot of the large oaken staircase. The smoke was thickening fast, and he stumbled in the darkness on something lying prone on the floor—a woman's form, too heavy for him to lift. His shouts brought helpers to his side, and poor Mrs. Peters was raised with difficulty, and carried, still insensible, into the air. Her dress was singed and disordered, and it struck them all at once, that she must have fled down stairs to escape the fire, and in her terror had fallen and stunned herself. If so, what had become of her mistress ?

"Merciful Heaven protect her ! Run and rouse up the Doctor, wherever he is, and let him see what he can do for the woman ; and you, Bowles, Richards, all who have any pluck among you, come and help me save Mrs. Clarendon !"

There was no flinching on the part of the men—they were ready to do anything ; but who could penetrate a wall of smoke, that stifled them as they tried to ascend ? Cecil dashed up half way—his weak lungs failing almost immediately, he was carried back again by Bowles, to renew the attempt as soon as he regained his breath, and only to be beaten down as before. The smoke rolled along the gallery like the waves of the sea, and the roaring of flames was enough to strike terror into the boldest heart.

"The back-stairs, let us try them !" cried Richards, and they rushed in that direction ; but, alas ! those stairs did not communicate with the end of the house where the fire was raging ; the enemy was still between them and the victim they were endeavouring to rescue. "Ladders ! ladders !" was the cry, as once more they retraced their steps, and hurried out into the grounds, where a crowd was now fast gathering from the village, roused by the ringing of the alarm-bell from the stables. Engines

were expected every minute and many hands were employed in carrying out the furniture and paintings from the lower rooms, as the dryness of the weather had made everything like tinder, and fears were entertained that the whole house would be consumed before effectual means could be taken. But what would Roland reck of house or property if his heart's best treasure were not rescued too? and oh! how long it seemed before a ladder could be found!

"They've brought one now, Mr. Percival — here it comes, thank God!" almost sobbed Bowles, as a party of labourers dragged in the desired instrument of safety; "we'll save her now, or die for it, that we will. Oh, sir, sir —" clutching Cecil's coat in sudden terror, such as no danger had roused in his stout heart, "look there— who, and what is *that*?"

Marion had slept, the first part of the night, the quiet sleep of languid convalescence. She had wished to be left alone, without a light; and at her desire, Dr. Wartop had gone to bed, and Peters to lie down in another room. Gradually the invalid became aware, even in her sleep, of something oppressive to her breathing: it mingled with her dreams, and brought back, as has happened to more than one of us at times, the recollection of another dream, long ago passed away. Again she heard the roar of waters, and the shouts of men calling to her to escape, and as before, could not move hand or foot, and panting, struggling, woke up at last, to find her room full of smoke, making her weak eyes smart painfully, and filling her lungs with the choking fumes of burnt wood. She made a faint effort to ring the bell, and started to feel the wall hot to her touch. She shrieked to Peters to come to her, but no one answered; she tried to creep from her bed, but a deadly faintness seized her, and she sank back on her pillow. The smoke grew thicker and thicker, and she knew what it must mean—fire was close at hand, and she could not escape; she was already nearly exhausted with the difficulty of breathing.

She thought—as in the most tremendous moments the mind has power to think—of all she had to leave—of

her husband, her child, her uncle and aunt, her unhappy brother, her friends and her poor, and felt that such a death was bitter indeed. Strangely, vividly, came back before her mental vision the happiest scenes of her short life ; she was watching the Jungfrau in the moonlight, with Roland by her side—she was listening to his tender vows in her uncle's study—she was sharing his embrace with his new-born child. And all to end like this ! Who would tell him when he returned ? How would he ever know how dearly she had loved him ?

But even in that agony of the shadow of death, her faith stood by her like a strengthening angel. If it were His will, in whom she trusted, helpless in His hands, she could look up, and trust Him still. He could deliver, or He could help her to bear the worst, and He could comfort them all when she was gone. A prayer for blessings on her beloved, for pardon and mercy for herself, was on her lips as she lay with tightly-clasped hands, and shortening breath, waiting for her doom, when the door opened for a moment, giving her one glimpse of flashing flame beyond, and, as it closed again, Harcourt sprang to her bedside.

“ My Marion ! thank God I have reached you ! Do not be frightened, we have time enough. You can trust your brother to take care of you.”

He flung the shutters and window open to let out the smoke, and the moonbeams shone quietly in, strangely contrasted with the scene they looked upon. The air revived Marion a little, and she half raised herself on her elbow.

“ Is it you, Harcourt ? I thought no one could come near me, and that I was left to die.”

“ I thought so too, and it gave me strength to come. They are getting a ladder, so we have plenty of time : do not be afraid.” He was stripping a blanket from the bed to wrap round her. “ Can you walk, dear Marion ? for if not, you must trust yourself to my arms again. I carried you in, and I can well carry you out.”

“ I tried to stand just now, but could not. No, Harcourt, you are too weak to lift me ; you cannot save

me alone—save yourself to comfort Roland, and tell him
—tell him ——”

“ Hush—do not agitate yourself more than you can help. We can but try, and if we fail, we will leave the world together.”

He laid the blanket down, and stooped over her. “ It is your brother, remember, Marion—only your brother. Trust him, and pray for him, that he may be allowed to save, or die with you.”

She put her weak arms round his neck, and kissed him for the first time ; then passively allowed him to wrap her from head to foot, and lift her in his arms. He tried the passage first, as it was not easy to reach the parapet below the window ; but the fire was gaining ground too rapidly—it had already seized on the walls of the room, and the paper was blistering in all directions. With great difficulty he let himself down with his helpless burden upon the parapet, and looked below. What were they all about there that they brought no ladder, and the very stone-work growing hot under his feet ? Ha ! there was one coming ; and there, too, was a man who had sense and courage—and he lifted his voice like a trumpet, and called Cecil Percival by name.

And the up-turned faces saw by the blended light of fire and moon the master they had mourned as dead.

Percival heard the voice, and knew the form, and while every one else recoiled with fear, or was stupefied with amazement, rushed forwards to respond to his appeal, planted the ladder which the men were nearly letting fall, and mounted to meet him half way. By their united efforts, Marion was carried down, and all three were safe on the terrace before any of the spectators had recovered from the shock of the surprise. Cecil’s voice soon brought assistance round them, and busy hands took possession of poor Marion, enveloping her in coats and shawls, till a mattress was procured, on which she was borne, at Percival’s desire, to the White House. He would have walked by her side, but he could not leave Harcourt, whose energy had expended itself in that brave deed, and who was now leaning on his shoulder for sup-

port, with a wild light in his eyes, more like joy than had been seen there for many a weary day.

"Let the walls burn down!" he said, as curious and wondering faces came round, to see if it were really himself, and not a spectre or illusion. "The jewel is safe, and no matter for the box and the cotton. Ay, my good fellows, you may stare as you please now—it is no longer a secret that I am alive, and I do not care who knows it. Bear me witness, all of you, that I have paid my debt sevenfold—a life like *hers* for one like *his*—is not that compensation enough? If not, I have nothing more worth giving; certainly not my own. I say, Percival, help me to bed, will you, somewhere—for I want to hold out till Roland comes back, for his sake and hers."

His head drooped with the words, and Percival, the tears running down his cheeks, carried him, with the help of Bowles, to the house of Mrs. Porchester.

The engines had now arrived, and strenuous efforts were being made to save the remainder of the mansion, but with that he had no more concern; he could only think of the lives that had been saved, and thank God in his heart that he had spoken the truth to Stella.

"Is that you, Roland?"

"Yes, dear old fellow—are you better now?"

"I suppose so, as I can talk about it. I have been lying here some time wondering whether I were alive or dead, or out of my senses. Have I been talking in my sleep?"

"No, and you are not to talk much now. You are to get strong by degrees, and live to make us all happy."

"I see. Get me some water, dear boy. Thanks—I begin to remember. Is Morlands done for?"

"Only that wing—no lives lost, thank Heaven, and—and—" here Roland's hands closed on his brother's, "thank you, too, Noll. I must not say what I feel now."

"No, don't, for I could not bear it. The darling! She was sensible the whole time, and lay in my arms like a trusting child. Once my foot nearly slipped, and I felt her shiver, but she only murmured a prayer. I could

have died then very happily—now it will be hard, **weary** work to go, and there is a great deal to be done first. Have you secured advice?"

"All right; Mr —— will be down to-morrow. They telegraphed for me, and I left word that he might follow."

"Then I must keep quiet to-day, and be ready for him. I should like to see Stella once more—and then I want to speak to dear old Brudenell."

Stella was close at hand, longing, yet almost dreading to be admitted; and when Roland brought her to the bedside, her emotion at the sight of Harcourt's altered features would hardly allow her to speak. He held her by the hand, and gazed at her wistfully and admiringly; for it was new to him to see her thus, and it gave her face the gentleness he had sometimes felt to be the attraction it wanted. He gazed, but it was as we gaze at something that reminds us of scenes long passed, the memory of which is pleasant, but it is a memory, and nothing more. He had little to say to her, beyond asking her forgiveness, not only for the shame he had brought on all his kindred, but for any unkindness or neglect of which he might have been guilty; and then he spoke of Cecil Percival, and saw by her blush how matters stood. She knelt by his pillow, and told him the truth, and how she had trifled with them both, and had found happiness when she expected it least; and that the devotion of the rest of her life would be all too little to make her worthy of the attachment of such a man. And when he asked if he could do anything to promote her happiness, she owned with tears there was one thing troubled her sadly—not the want of fortune—Cecil knew all her affairs, and they were both prepared to face poverty and privation—she should mind nothing if she could but see him easy in his mind; he was quite ill with nervous self-reproach; she might not explain the cause—and all she implored her cousins was to deal with him tenderly, and give him comfort.

"Is it connected with my wretched story? I see it is," said Harcourt, rousing himself from his lethargy. "I have brought misery everywhere—let me remedy it while

I can. Go to him, Roland—go this moment. Learn the whole truth, and recollect you owe your darling's life more to him than to me. He did his best to save us—it is the work he has been doing all along."

Roland was not sorry to withdraw, for his own excited feelings were fast overpowering the self-control he had been forced to exercise before his brother. He went to the room where his friends were waiting to confer with him; the Vicar he had seen already, for he met him at the station, but he was not quite prepared to find both the Percivals, and the General and his daughter, and to be assailed by all in turn, Cecil only excepted, with eager questions as to what they could severally or collectively do to help him. All knew the terrible inference that must be drawn from the fact of Harcourt's existence, though no one could put the question of his guilt or innocence in plain words—and Roland could say little to satisfy them. Harcourt alone could answer, and he must not be disturbed. There was one person, however, whom he must thank before them all for his gallant exertions to save his dear wife, and that was Cecil—and pressing through the others to where the curate stood, he wrung his hand with a vigour that would at any other time have given him pain, but was then hardly felt. With a flush on his brow, and a sad humility in his whole bearing, that almost transformed him into another man, Cecil turned from his friend to those whose murmur of applause was seconding his gratitude.

"Before you honour me with your good opinion," he said, slowly and firmly, "I beg you will hear what I have to say. I am not the truthful man some of you have believed me to be—I have been guilty for two years of carrying on a deception, which may be palliated by the circumstances, but cannot be excused. I make no excuse—I only state the fact. When that poor body was found by the Wilde-See, and brought to Baden for identification, I was the only person who could attempt to do so. I told the authorities it was too late—it could not be identified then; I told a lie—I knew it was the body of Robert Trail."

"You did?" said Roland, unable to believe his senses.

"Yes; not by the face—no one could tell that—it was by a mark on his arm that I remembered perfectly, having often seen it when he was ill at Durningham—a device tattooed just below the elbow. The arms and hands were in tolerable preservation. I could have sworn to that arm—and I held my peace."

"What made you do so?" asked the General.

"I knew exactly how the case must stand—that if Trail were dead, and Harcourt had escaped in his clothes, Harcourt must have killed him. I could not betray his secret—I could not! I believe, were it to happen again, I should do as I then did; and yet I know I was wrong, for it was untruth, and want of faith. I thought more of what others would suffer by the knowledge than of what was simply right, and I have suffered quite enough in my conscience since to convince me, if I needed convincing. If Roland can forgive me—perhaps my uncle will—who has had a great deal to put up with from my pride and presumption. If they cannot—I can only say it is just."

"I could not have believed," said Mr. Brudenell to his wife, when describing the scene to her afterwards, "that any one could have been so changed by any circumstance in so short a time, as this has changed Cecil Percival. He disarmed us all; there was no one who could have breathed a word against him, even when he left the room. There was a dignity in his self-abasement, that made us feel little in our own eyes. And yet he was quite right—it would have been wiser, as well as better, if he had spoken the truth at the first. Harcourt might have been spared much that he has suffered; and Roland all that he is suffering now. Unless I am much mistaken, and Wartop too, there is more sorrow in store for him yet."

They were not mistaken; the sorrow came on even faster than they had looked for it. The foreboding that had driven Clarendon back to his home—without which, indeed, he would never have returned—was only too swiftly to be fulfilled; and from that night that he rescued his sister, Harcourt's strength sank rapidly, defying me-

dical skill and tender nursing. He roused himself for a long interview with the experienced lawyer his brother had engaged, and under his instructions secured Roland and his tenants, as far as possible, from inconvenience ; and in the presence of the Vicar, and of Mr. Percival of Durningham, dictated a full confession of his sorely-repentured act of manslaughter—asking pardon of God and man, and leaving it to his brother to make what poor atonement money could make, to the memory of the dead, and any survivor to whom his rights descended.

When all this was done, he seemed to have laid his earthly cares aside, and Mr. Brudenell had no difficulty now in winning his ear to listen to the truth. Misfortune had been a teacher from whom he could not shrink, and her lessons had prepared him for those of his old friend, who never left him, night or day. Of his other friends he took leave with affectionate tenderness, as if relinquishing his hold on them and on the world ; but to Mr. Brudenell, and his brother and sister, he clung to the last. Marion was too weak herself to be his nurse, but she persisted in creeping down to his room, and however restless he might have been before, he was soothed the moment he heard her step. He never spoke to her of the past, or recalled his old passionate love—but his eyes dwelt on her when they could dwell on nothing else, and her name was on his lips when he died.

Faithful to his last charge, Roland did his utmost to find a representative of the unfortunate Trail, and, with Cecil's help, did at last discover a not undeserving family of orphans, on whom he could relieve himself by pouring out his bounty. Another piece of tardy justice was also done, by the removal of the inscription in the cemetery of Baden, and the substitution of another, explaining the mournful truth. It was read by the good Abbé, who remembered the funeral, and the grief of the English stranger, and understood at last the words that had so interested him then, and why that grief had been so exceedingly bitter.

Percival was slow in recovering his strength and spirits,

but his uncle's fatherly kindness stood him in good stead ; he settled on him a liberal allowance ; promoted, with Roland's co-operation, his marriage with Miss Porchester, and sent them abroad, with the promise that, if he returned fit for work, he should come back to Durningham, where Mr. Holmby was ready to receive him with open arms. Roland, at Marion's special request, not only insisted on making a settlement on Stella, but helped her and her mother out of all their difficulties ; and so sorely had the young lady felt their burden, that she made a wise resolve never to assume such another. She married Cecil in the autumn, went with him on a pleasant tour alone, and has since settled down at Durningham with as much good will as if she were actually the Lady of the Manor, which she fully intends to be some day.

Gervase Wray also went abroad, and remained there. The breach between them was never quite explained, but those who indulged in gossip, surmised that Mrs. Jones knew more than most people on that subject—she having received a private budget of letters and papers, reflecting so little credit on Mr. Wray's past, and suggesting so little comfort for his future, that a less high-spirited individual than Stella would have been deterred from sharing it. He was a man with whom any one could be friendly, so long as they only saw the surface ; once go deeper, and friendship, such as deserves the name, was morally impossible.

Roland and Marion have several children now, and Morlands has repaired its injuries, and its galleries echo with little feet, and its gardens with little voices. And the Vicar, as his step grows slower, and his eyesight more dim, on his path to his quiet rest, finds a never-failing joy in those tiny fingers that cling to his, as if they knew his value, and would detain him if they could. They cannot do it long, but they make him very happy, and their own happiness in his presence is not shadowed, like that of their parents, with the dread of the parting that is to come. Roland and Marion are devoted to those tried friends, who have been to them as second parents ; and Mrs. Brudenell's yearning heart has vacancies no longer,

for Marion's children are to her as her own. She has her full share of their love, and of the care and anxiety from which, in this world, love is never free.

It was long before any of them could speak of him they had lost without tears—it will be longer still before they forget him. The heir of Morlands bears his name; and when Marion bends over his pillow at night, the blessings that are so tenderly breathed on the living Harcourt, often blend with those that keep sacred the memory of the dead.

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